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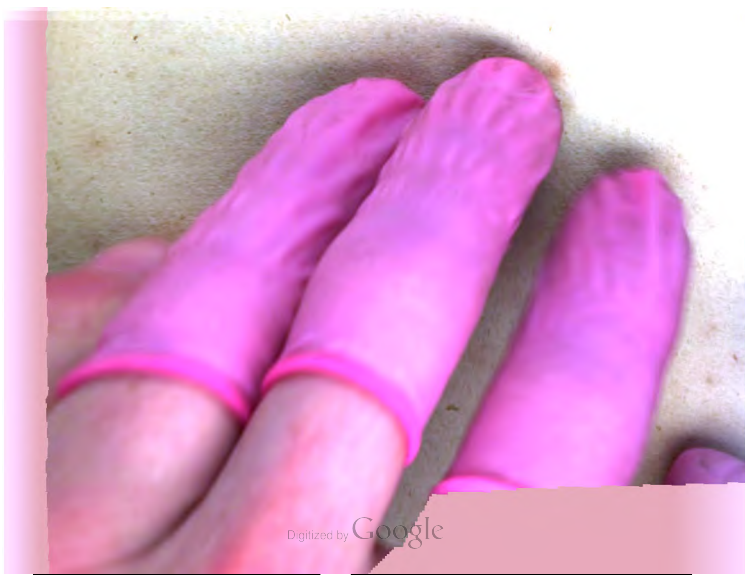
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*Rev. d W. Wilson.*







A  
TREATISE  
ON  
SPIRITUAL COMFORT.

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By  
JOHN COLQUHOUN, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, LEITH

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SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED.

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*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak  
ye comfortably to Jerusalem.* ISA. xl. 1, 2.

*Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is  
before him; therefore trust thou in him.* JOB xxxv. 14.

*My heart trusted in him and I am helped: therefore my  
heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise  
him.* Ps. xxviii. 7.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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It has often occurred to the Author, that, as spiritual consolation in this valley of tears, is highly necessary to support and encourage the hearts of exercised Christians, and so, to make them advance with alacrity, in the love and practice of true holiness, as well as to enable them to perform every particular duty, with increasing cheerfulness and resolution; so they need to be instructed often, in the unspeakable importance of such comfort, and in the means of attaining an increase of it.

UNDER the forcible impression of these sentiments, and from a desire to contribute his feeble endeavours, to promote the consolation and edification of believers, the Author engaged in the following work. It has been his aim, at the same time that he has endeavoured to avoid a plan which may be defective in its parts, or irregular in their distribution, to render his subject easy and intelligible; and so to adapt the work to the capaci-

ties, even of the weakest and most illiterate Christians. He does not presume to have fully attained these objects. How far he has succeeded, and wherein he has failed in the attempt, it does not become him to say. The judicious and candid reader will determine.

If any thing contained in the following pages, shall, by the blessing of Him who is the Consolation of Israel, be rendered useful but to one disconsolate believer, the labour of the Author will be amply compensated.

LEITH,  
*February, 18, 1813.* }

# CONTENTS.

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	Page.
INTRODUCTION,.....	1
CHAP. I. <i>Of spiritual comfort in general</i> ,.....	4
<i>Reflections</i> ,.....	40
CHAP. II. <i>Of the great importance and usefulness of spiritual comfort, to the saints</i> ,.....	47
<i>Reflections</i> ,.....	70
CHAP. III. <i>Of the way in which believers lose their spiritual comfort</i> ,.....	75
<i>Reflections</i> ,.....	115
CHAP. IV. <i>Of the grievous consequences of a believer's having lost his spiritual consolation</i> ,.....	120
<i>Reflections</i> ,.....	154
CHAP. V. <i>Of the nature and signs of melancholy</i> ,.....	161
SECT. 1. <i>Of the signs of melancholy, especially in a true Christian</i> ,.....	162
SECT. 2. <i>Directions to Christians, who are afflicted with melancholy</i> ,.....	178
SECT. 3. <i>Advices to the relations and friends of such Christians, as are afflicted with melancholy</i> ,.....	190
<i>Reflections</i> ,.....	199
CHAP. VI. <i>Of the designs of God, in permitting some of his children to lose their spiritual comfort</i> ,.....	205
<i>Reflections</i> ,.....	235

CHAP. VII. <i>Of the means which disconsolate believers should employ, in order to recover their comfort,</i> .....	239
<i>Reflections, and objections answered,</i> .....	289
CHAP. VIII. <i>Of the means which believers ought to employ, in order to attain increasing comfort,</i> .....	310
<i>Reflections,</i> .....	360
CHAP. IX. <i>Of directions to believers, for attaining establishment in spiritual consolation,</i> ..	366
<i>Reflections,</i> .....	398



## ERRATUM.

Page 54, line 6, from the bottom, *for* לטובה *read* לטובת

# SPIRITUAL COMFORT.

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE persons for whose use, this treatise is more immediately intended, are they, who have by the Holy Spirit been convinced of the guilt, malignity, and demerit, of the sin which dwelleth in them, as well as of the iniquities that are committed by them; who have also been convinced of the utter insufficiency of their own righteousness, for their justification in the sight of God, and who have been enabled to embrace Jesus Christ, as their righteousness and strength. All of this description are earnestly desirous of advancing in holiness, but many of them, seem to be far from being duly sensible of the high importance of spiritual *consolation*, to the love and practice of holiness. They are soon apprehensive of danger, if they feel iniquities prevailing against them; but they yield, without alarm, to that dejection of spirit, which is often occasioned, either by inward conflicts or outward trials; not considering, that disquietude of soul paves the way for despondency, and despondency for utter despair: all which are, in a high degree, injurious to the spiritual welfare of the soul. Trouble of mind, especially when it proceeds the length of despondency, strengthens the unbelief and enmity of the heart against God; and so disqualifies the Christian for performing *acceptably*, the duties incumbent upon him. Although God doth not suffer any of his children,



ever to fall into the horrible gulf of *absolute* despair, yet some of them have brought themselves to the very brink of it; so as greatly to dishonour their holy profession, to injure their own souls, and to hurt the souls of many around them, who are always too ready to impute their dejection of spirit, to the holy religion which they profess. Thus, they often discourage the hearts of some, who are seeking Jesus; and strengthen the prejudices of others, who are enemies to him.

The sovereign antidote to that sinful and grievous distemper of mind, is the spiritual and holy consolation, which is offered and promised in the gospel. Much of the sacred Volume was written for this end, that the saints might be comforted, and that they, "through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope<sup>a</sup>." God, in the exceeding riches of his grace, has given in his word, and confirmed by his oath, many great and precious promises; in order that all "who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them," might not only have consolation, but strong consolation. He hath spoken in his holiness, on purpose that they might rejoice<sup>b</sup>; that they might be so "filled with all joy and peace in believing<sup>c</sup>," as to serve him with gladness<sup>d</sup>; and thereby, to recommend faith and holiness to all around them.

Such pleasure, doth the Lord Jesus take in the prosperity of his servants, and so deeply is he concerned for their happiness, even in this valley of

<sup>a</sup> Rom. xv. 4.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. ix. 6.

<sup>c</sup> Rom. xv. 13.

<sup>d</sup> Ps. c. 2.

tears, that he hath commanded them, “to comfort one another <sup>c</sup>,” “to comfort the mævels together <sup>f</sup>,” and especially, “to comfort the feeble-minded <sup>g</sup>.” And, doubtless, if private Christians are bound to comfort one another, much more is it the duty of ministers of the gospel, to imitate the apostles of Christ, in being helpers of their joy <sup>h</sup>. Accordingly, this solemn charge is given, and is again, and a third time, repeated to those; “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned <sup>i</sup>.”

That I therefore may, in obedience to that high command, be instrumental in administering comfort to such afflicted and discouraged believers, as may be disposed to read this treatise; I shall, in dependance on the Spirit of truth, endeavour,

First, to discourse of spiritual comfort in general.

Secondly, I shall consider the great importance and usefulness of it to believers.

In the third place, I shall shew the way in which, many of them lose the comfort which they formerly attained.

Fourthly, I shall point out some of the sad consequences of their having forfeited their usual comfort.

In the Fifth place, I shall briefly consider the nature and the signs of melancholy.

Next, I shall unfold some of the designs of God,

<sup>c</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 18.    <sup>f</sup> 1 Thess. v. 11.    <sup>g</sup> 1 Thess. v. 14.

<sup>h</sup> 2 Cor. i. 24.    <sup>i</sup> Isa. xl. 1, 2.

in permitting any of his saints to lose their wonted consolation.

Afterwards, I shall shew how disconsolate Christians may recover their former comfort.

Next, I shall point out the means which they ought to employ, in order to attain increasing comfort. And,

In the Last place, I shall give some directions, by observing which, exercised believers may become established in spiritual consolation.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### OF SPIRITUAL COMFORT IN GENERAL.

COMFORT, in its general acceptation, is that refreshing pleasure, or enlivening satisfaction of spirit, by which a man is upheld and strengthened against all evils, whether felt or feared: or, it is that inward solace, which supports and invigorates the heart under trouble of every kind. There are *three* sorts of comfort; natural, sinful, and spiritual.—*Natural* comfort is the refreshment of our natural spirits, by the good creatures of God, the gifts of his bounty. When God “giveth us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, he thereby fill-eth our hearts with food and gladness<sup>k</sup>.” There is comfort in every creature of God. When we are hungry, food comforts us; when thirsty, drink refreshes us; when cold, clothes warm us; and when in affliction, or in want of advice, friends encourage us. But, besides these common and

<sup>k</sup> Acts xiv. 17.

necessary gifts of Providence, every sense hath something peculiar to itself, which affords it comfort. The eyes have beautiful colours, to give them pleasure: the ears, besides ordinary, have melodious sounds, to delight them: the taste has not only the suitableness of common food, but the sweetness of honey, to please it; and the smell, besides common odours, has fragrant flowers to regale it.—*Sinful*, or unholy comfort, is the pleasure which sinners take in gratifying their lusts, or the delight which they have in abusing the gifts of Divine bounty. Sometimes, the true Christian is ready to wonder how wicked men can, at any time, feel themselves comfortable: but he has no cause to wonder; for their very commission of sin, is a momentary comfort to their depraved nature. “It is as sport to a fool to do mischief<sup>1</sup>.” “The scorers delight in their scorning<sup>m</sup>.” “Their soul delighteth in their abominations<sup>n</sup>.” To commit iniquity is agreeable to their sinful nature, and therefore is a comfort to it. Indeed, were it not for the frequent opportunities which they have, of gratifying some lust, either of the flesh or of the mind, life would be an insupportable burden to them. “Evil men,” saith Solomon, “sleep not, except they have done mischief: and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall<sup>o</sup>.” Ah! How inexpressibly dreadful is the condition of that man, to whose heart it is a pleasure, a *comfort*, to sin against a holy, and a gracious God! Sinful comfort also, is the pleasure

<sup>1</sup> Prov. x. 23.<sup>m</sup> Prov. i. 22.<sup>n</sup> Isa. lxvi. 3.<sup>o</sup> Prov. iv. 10.

that self-righteous persons take, in relying, either on their own righteousness wholly, or partly on the righteousness of Christ, and partly on their own, for their justification and title to eternal life; and the delight which hypocrites feel, in reflecting on their counterfeit graces and attainments.—*Spiritual* or holy comfort, is that inward solace or satisfaction, which supports, strengthens, and exhilarates holy souls; and which they have in and from the Lord Jesus, their Covenant-head, by the exercise of faith, hope, love, and the other graces of the Holy Spirit<sup>p</sup>; or it is that spiritual delight, that holy joy, which cheers and invigorates the hearts of believers, under all their inward and outward troubles. It is this only that deserves the name of pure, solid, and durable consolation. If it is a comfort to the wicked man, amidst all his afflictions, to gratify his carnal and ungodly lusts; it cannot, surely, but be a real and even a great consolation to a holy man, under all the trials of life, to exercise his spiritual graces, and to perform his holy duties.

The word *Comfort* is, in Scripture, used in a *twofold* sense. It is sometimes employed to express that which gives consolation; but more frequently, to signify the consolation itself, which is received from it, or enjoyed by means of it. 1st, It is employed in Scripture, to express that which gives, or is a mean of giving, consolation to the soul of an afflicted believer; whether it be a person<sup>q</sup> or a thing, in which, by the blessing of Christ, comfort is hidden, and by which it is afforded<sup>r</sup>; or, a word or reason, suggesting to the mind of the

<sup>p</sup> Rom. v. 1—5.

<sup>q</sup> Col. iv. 11.

<sup>r</sup> Ps. cxix. 76.

Christian, matter of consolation \*. Each of these is styled *Comfort*, because it is a mean or instrument of dispensing consolation to the saints. 2d, The term is, by the Spirit of inspiration, more frequently employed to express the consolation *itself*, which believers receive, whether by means of persons, or of things, or of reasons; and which they feel or enjoy in their souls. It is in this *last* sense, chiefly, that I propose, in this treatise, to discourse of spiritual comfort.

In order to illustrate *the general nature* of this inestimable blessing, I shall present it, to the view of the devout reader, under the following particulars:

1. Spiritual comfort usually supposes *trouble* of some kind, either felt or feared; or the prospect of some *difficult duty*, to the performance of which the believer needs to be encouraged. It is under affliction, or uneasiness, that the heart of the Christian needs to be comforted. The Lord Jesus accordingly saith, “Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.” He made the first promise of the Holy Spirit, as a Comforter, to his disciples, when, in the prospect of his departure from them, sorrow had filled their heart<sup>u</sup>. “God,” says the apostle Paul, “comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble<sup>w</sup>,” and he styles him, “The God, who comforteth them that are cast down<sup>x</sup>.” The soul, that it may be qualified for spiritual consolation, must be *quicken- ed and humbled*. It is “the spirit of the humble,

\* Ps. cxix. 50. 2 Cor. i. 4.

<sup>t</sup> Matt. v. 4.

<sup>u</sup> John xvi. 6, 7. <sup>w</sup> 2 Cor. i. 4.

<sup>x</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 6.

and the heart of the contrite ones," that the high and lofty One will revive with holy comfort <sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the oil of spiritual joy is such, that no vessel but a contrite heart, can hold it. The design of imparting Divine consolation, is to cheer and invigorate the drooping spirit. The office of the Comforter is, to relieve the disconsolate soul <sup>2</sup>. It is impossible for them who have never felt the uneasiness of a wounded conscience, to value, or to desire, the joy of God's salvation.—The soul, that it may need, and be prepared for, true consolation, must not only be quickened and humbled, but be under some *affliction*, either felt or apprehended. Comfort, according to an apostolical direction, is to be administered to "the feeble-minded <sup>3</sup>;" to such as are ready to stagger under the cross, and to be upset by the temptations of Satan and the world, or discouraged because of the corruptions of their own hearts. It is trouble, that renders spiritual consolation necessary, as well as desirable. If the believer were not feeble, and incapable of being supported by a created arm, the office of a Divine Comforter would be unnecessary. If he had not a painful, as well as a spiritual, sense of his want of heavenly consolations, earthly comforts would be more acceptable to him than they: and if his heart were not prepared for them, by being humbled, as well as afflicted, they would no more refresh it, than a shower of rain would refresh a rock. Accordingly, Christ seldom communicates sensible comfort to the saints, but when they are either in inward or outward trouble.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lvii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Lam. i. 16.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Thess. v. 14.

It is by their being troubled, that they become disconsolate, and so become fit for being consoled: and it is their sharpest afflictions, that often serve to prepare them for the sweetest consolations. He, therefore, brings them usually into the wilderness, before he speaks comfortably to them<sup>b</sup>. It may be proper here to remark that, as Divine comfort is the opposite of trouble<sup>c</sup>, so it must be more powerful and effectual, than either outward or inward trouble; for there is no prevailing, but by that which is the stronger: it must be more forcible to raise up the dejected soul, than the grievance is, to cast it down; otherwise it cannot at the time, be comfort to it.

2. There are *three degrees* of spiritual comfort: the lowest degree is peace of conscience; the next is joy; and the highest is triumph.

*Peace* of conscience is that inward serenity, or tranquillity of mind, which arises from the faith and sense of being justified in the sight of God, or of being in a state of union with Christ, and of conformity to him. "Being justified by faith," says the apostle Paul, "we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>d</sup>." The peace, with which the God of hope filleth the hearts of the saints, is *peace in believing*<sup>e</sup>. It arises also

<sup>b</sup> Hos. ii. 14.

<sup>c</sup> Luther says, that 'All things come from Christ to his church, in contraries: he is righteousness, but it is in sin felt: he is life, but it is in death: he is consolation, but it is in calamity.' Augustine likewise observes, that 'the Christian's life runs on between these two; our crosses and God's comforts.'

<sup>d</sup> Rom. v. 1.

<sup>e</sup> Rom. xv. 13.



from the *sense*, or consciousness of peace with God. When the blood of Christ is, by faith, applied to the conscience, the conscience is purged by it from dead works<sup>f</sup>; and the heart also is, at the same time, sprinkled by it from an evil conscience<sup>g</sup>. The subject of spiritual peace, is a conscience that is purged. Purity and peace are connected together in the conscience; and they are both necessary to render it a good conscience<sup>h</sup>. When the conscience is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, it is thereby set free from the dread of revenging wrath. The mind is not as formerly, disturbed with alarming fears of God's indignation, nor disquieted by his judgments<sup>i</sup>. This is accompanied usually, with a cordial acquiescence in the will of the Lord, founded on a persuasion of his wisdom and sovereignty, of his holiness and goodness: and so far as a man attains this holy acquiescence in the Divine will, he is secure from disappointment; and free from uneasiness. Now, this peaceful serenity of soul, is the first degree of spiritual comfort. When the Lord Jesus would comfort his disconsolate disciples, he said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in me ye might have peace<sup>k</sup>."

*Joy* is a higher degree of holy consolation. Spiritual joy is that gladness of heart, which flows from the lively exercise of faith, feasting upon Christ in the offers and promises of the gospel. The apostle Paul prayed thus for the believers at Rome; "Now the God of hope, fill you with

<sup>f</sup> Heb. ix. 14<sup>g</sup> Heb. x. 22.<sup>h</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5.<sup>i</sup> Prov. i. 33.<sup>k</sup> John xvi. 33.<sup>l</sup> Rom. xv. 13.

all joy and peace in *believing*<sup>1</sup>:" and the apostle Peter said to the Christians of the dispersion, "*Believing, ye rejoice*<sup>m</sup>." It is a holy delight, in living upon Christ, and in walking in him; and it is effected by the Holy Spirit shedding abroad in the heart, like a fragrant perfume, the love of God. When he graciously condescends to administer that reviving cordial, it elevates and enlarges the fainting soul. Arising, as it does, from the begun enjoyment, and from the hope of the full and endless enjoyment of God in Christ, it strengthens, and so comforts the drooping heart. "The joy of the Lord," saith Nehemiah, "is your strength"<sup>n</sup>. Peace is negative; joy is positive comfort: the former is as the calming of the storm; the latter, as the breaking out of the sun: that is a mitigation of trouble; this, a sense of positive enjoyment. When a condemned criminal knows that he is pardoned, he has peace; but when he is besides advanced to preferment, he has joy.

*Triumph* is the highest degree of consolation. The saints triumph, when they so greatly rejoice, as almost to shout for joy, on account of the victory given them over their spiritual enemies. They triumph, when, more than conquerors through him who loved them, they exult or rejoice, in their almighty Redeemer, with rapturous delight. This was often the attainment of the holy apostle Paul, and of his fellow-labourers in the gospel. "Thanks be unto God," says he, "which *always* causeth us to triumph in Christ"<sup>o</sup>."

<sup>m</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.<sup>n</sup> Neh. viii. 10.<sup>o</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 14.

A lofty description of this their triumph, he giveth in Rom. viii. 31—39. How high did heavenly consolation rise, in the soul of that holy apostle, when he was writing that sublime passage! In like manner does the believer triumph, when, in his pursuit of more communion with Christ, and conformity to him, he is enabled to vanquish great opposition. In some happy moments of his life, his joy, like a river swelled by impetuous rains, bursteth all its banks, and carrieth all the joys and all the sorrows of this world before it. It is then, especially, that it may be styled, “Joy unspeakable and full of glory<sup>p</sup>.” It is glorious in itself, and is attended with glorying in the Lord Jesus. When the heart of the Christian is elevated to this degree of consolation, he glories in the Lord. All that is in this world is brought under him: the greatest calamities cannot daunt him. He sets Christ, and God in Christ, against all enemies and all evils, whether external or internal. This triumphant glorying in the Lord, is like that of the holy Psalmist, who said, “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord<sup>q</sup>.” It is remarkable, that these three degrees of spiritual comfort are, by our apostle, mentioned in a single passage<sup>r</sup>: “We have,” says he, “*peace* with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ;...we *rejoice* in hope;...and not only so, but we *glory* in tribulations also.”

3. Spiritual consolation is, according to the covenant of grace, given to believers, by God the Father, by Christ the second Adam, and by the Holy Spirit. God the Father giveth it, by sovereign and

<sup>p</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.

<sup>q</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 2.

<sup>r</sup> Rom. v. 1—3.

judiciary authority; Christ the mediator, by gracious dispensation; and the Holy Spirit, by effectual operation. God the Father ordaineth it for his children<sup>\*</sup>; Christ the last Adam, administers it; and the blessed Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, applieth it to them.

Holy consolation is given them by *God the Father*. None but Jehovah himself, can pour consolation into a troubled soul. All true comfort is, originally and fundamentally in Him. He it is, whom the apostle Paul styles, “The God of all comfort, who comforteth the saints in all their tribulation<sup>†</sup>,” and, “The Father, who hath loved them, and hath given them everlasting consolation<sup>‡</sup>.” He also calls him, “The God of consolation<sup>§</sup>,” and “The Comforter of those that are cast down<sup>||</sup>.” The Lord compareth himself to a father pitying his children<sup>¶</sup>, and to a mother comforting, with tenderest concern, her afflicted infant<sup>‡</sup>. He chargeth his servants, “to strengthen the weak hands, to confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, he will come and save you<sup>¶</sup>.” He suffered his only and beloved Son to be, in all points, tempted like as his people are, that he might sympathise with, and comfort them, under all their temptations.

Comfort is administered to them by *Jesus Christ*,

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. xxvi. 12.

<sup>¶</sup> Rom. xv. 5.

<sup>‡</sup> Isa. lxvi. 13.

<sup>†</sup> 2 Cor. i. 3, 4.

<sup>‡</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 6.

<sup>§</sup> Isa. xxxv. 3, 4.

<sup>||</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 16.

<sup>¶</sup> Ps. ciii. 13.

their Covenant-head. The Lord Jesus is the Trustee, the store-house, of all spiritual comfort, to the saints: from Him, as the hope set before them, they may daily derive strong consolation. Hence he is styled, "The Consolation of Israel <sup>b</sup>." He is the matter of his people's consolation; the Prince of peace, the true Noah, "who comforteth them, concerning the work and toil of their hands." It is a part of his high office, to which he was anointed by the blessed Spirit, "to comfort them who mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise, for the spirit of heaviness <sup>c</sup>." There is therefore "consolation in Christ <sup>d</sup>;" and the consolation of the saints aboundeth by Christ <sup>e</sup>: they have it, in him and through him, with him and by him. His person, righteousness, fulness, and love, are the source and substance of abundant consolation to them, against trouble of every kind. He it is, who giveth peace to his people: and "when He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble <sup>f</sup>?" Nothing can comfort the heart without Christ. He removes from the soul, all that is dismal, and bestows upon it, all that is comfortable. He it is, who maketh even the darkness of trouble itself, to be light before them who trust in him. He is the Sun of righteousness, whose light, and warmth, and healing, cheer their souls. When he vouchsafes his reviving presence to them, he leaves a delightful perfume of comfort behind him. Indeed, a man can never know what true

<sup>b</sup> Luke ii. 25.<sup>e</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5.<sup>c</sup> Isa. lxi. 2, 3.<sup>f</sup> Job. xxxiv. 29.<sup>d</sup> Phil. ii. 1.

pleasure is, till he know Christ. The compassionate Redeemer, therefore, saith to all who are weary, toiling in a fruitless pursuit of happiness, and also to all who are heavy laden, oppressed with the servitude of sin, or bowed down under a load of misery, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest &c.”

Comfort is applied to the saints by *the Holy Spirit*. He is therefore styled, “The Comforter<sup>h</sup>.” Being the inestimable gift of the Father, through the mediation of the Son, he is “another Comforter<sup>i</sup>.” The adorable Spirit dischargeth this his office, by testifying of Christ, or by taking of the things of Christ, and shewing them to believers; by opening and applying the promises of the everlasting covenant to them, and by enabling them to believe these, with application to themselves; by shedding abroad the love of the Father and of the Son, in their hearts; by witnessing to them their adoption, and their being heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; by abiding in them, as the seal, the earnest, and the pledge, of their eternal inheritance; and by dwelling in them, as the Spirit of grace and of supplications. The Holy Spirit, like Noah’s dove, flieth with the olive-leaf of peace, to assure believers, that “the winter is past, and that the rain is over and gone.” He not only bringeth words of comfort to their remembrance, but opens their hearts to receive them. Comforts may be so applied as to be brought close to the heart; but, if the heart do not open for

<sup>h</sup> Matth. xi. 28.

<sup>h</sup> John xv. 26.

<sup>i</sup> John xiv. 16.

them, no consolation is experienced. The Spirit, therefore, not only openeth and applieth the promises to the heart ; but, openeth the heart for the comfort of the promises ; and then pours consolation into it. He comforts the saints also, by enabling them to trust that, in the Lord Jesus, they have righteousness and strength, forgiveness of sins, and a title to eternal life ; as well as, by renewing them after the image of the Son of God, and so, uniting their hearts to the holy *will* of God. The original word, in the New Testament, which we have translated, *a Comforter* <sup>k</sup>, signifies likewise, *an Advocate*. One special way, in which, the Holy Spirit comforts believers, is the exercise of his Advocacy or intercession in them <sup>l</sup>. The more they are enabled to pray in faith, the more do they walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost <sup>m</sup>.

4. The spiritual consolation, which is given to believers, is *a part of eternal life*. “ Believing ye rejoice <sup>n</sup>. ” “ He that believeth on the Son, *hath* everlasting life <sup>o</sup>. ” One part of the fruit of the Spirit, when he imparteth spiritual life to the soul, is *joy* <sup>p</sup>. But spiritual life in the soul, is eternal life begun. When God who cannot lie; promised, before the world began, eternal life to the second Adam for his spiritual seed ; he promised to him, that, upon condition of his bearing their griefs, and carrying their sorrows, they should become heirs of everlasting joy, and heirs of himself as their exceeding joy. As the saving knowledge

<sup>k</sup> John xiv. 16.

<sup>l</sup> Rom. viii. 26.

<sup>m</sup> Acts ix. 31.

<sup>n</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.

<sup>o</sup> John iii. 36.

<sup>p</sup> Gal. v. 22.

of Christ, in this world, is the earnest, and beginning of the beatific vision of God and the Lamb, in the heavenly world, and as conformity to Christ in holiness here, is the beginning of perfect conformity to him there; so the consolation, which the saints, on some occasions, feel, in this valley of tears, is the first fruits or beginning of that fullness of joy, which will constitute a part of their blessedness, in that holy place on high. The joy of the Holy Ghost, which enters into them here, is the same in kind, as the joy of their Lord, into which they will enter hereafter. It is therefore, by one apostle, styled "Everlasting consolation<sup>a</sup>," and by another, "Joy unspeakable and full of glory<sup>r</sup>." It is joy that is full of glory, or glorious joy; the very dawning of the day of glory. Holy consolation, is glory begun in the soul; a bud, which will open in heaven, and spread into ineffable and endless glory; a dawn, which will shine more and more, until the glorious Sun of righteousness, brighten it into perfect and eternal day. All the joy of the saints below, is but as a spark, a feeble spark, compared to that blaze of rapture, which will burn intensely in their spirits above. It is but a slight foretaste, a small drop, of that immense ocean of unmingled joy, which they are to inherit in the mansions of glory. Although they are not far from the heavenly Canaan; yet their hearts are often ready to faint, under their sufferings from without, and their conflicts with corruption from within: but a taste of the grapes of Eshcol, the first fruits of heaven, revives their

<sup>a</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 16.<sup>r</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.



spirit, rouses their zeal, and quickens their desire of that endless rest, which there remaineth for them. Consolation keeps the holy soul upon the wing, and increases her strength. It is the very *life* of the soul. When Naomi would express the comfort that Boaz should afford to Ruth, she said to her, "He shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life<sup>s</sup>." If the contentment and delight of the heart be taken away, it dieth. The souls of the wicked, have an existence in hell; yet, because it is an existence without comfort, their state is never said in Scripture, to be a state of life, but on the contrary, a state of death. Accordingly, the restoring of comfort to mourners, is called, a *reviving* of them<sup>t</sup>.

5. *The grounds and sources* of holy consolation, are especially the following: God in Christ, with all his glorious perfections, as a God of love, grace, and mercy, and as the God and portion of the saints<sup>u</sup>; Christ, in his glorious Person<sup>w</sup>, righteousness<sup>x</sup>, fulness, offices, and relations, or Christ living in them<sup>y</sup>, and living for them<sup>z</sup>; the Holy Spirit, as inhabiting, quickening, sanctifying, and sealing them, and as the earnest of their eternal inheritance<sup>a</sup>; the covenant of grace, as well ordered in all things and sure, according to which, Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is their God, and they are his people, his peculiar people<sup>b</sup>; the infinite atone-

<sup>s</sup> Ruth iv. 15.

<sup>t</sup> Isa. lvii. 15.

<sup>u</sup> Ps. xliii. 4.

<sup>w</sup> Phil. iii. 3.

<sup>x</sup> Isa. lxi. 10. and xxxii. 17.

<sup>y</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

<sup>z</sup> Rev. i. 18.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. i. 22.

<sup>b</sup> Jer. xxxi. 33.

ment <sup>c</sup>, the continual intercession <sup>d</sup>, the supreme dominion, the inviolable faithfulness, and the gracious presence, of the Lord Jesus, who is given for a covenant of the people; and the ordinances, doctrines, promises, and offers, of his gospel <sup>e</sup>, with the peremptory commandment, given to sinners in common, to believe on him <sup>f</sup>: these are the leading, and the immediate *grounds*, upon which, the saints do by faith, build their comfort; and they are, at the same time, the *sources*, from which, by the exercise of faith, they derive their consolation. Besides these, their faith and sense of the pardon of their sins, of the acceptance of their persons as righteous, of their adoption, of their sanctification, and of the witnessing of the blessed Spirit, are matter of consolation to them; and so is the lively exercise of all the graces of the Holy Spirit, especially of faith, hope, and love. The comfort of justification, because it is founded upon a righteousness which is perfect, and always the same, is more stable and permanent, than that of sanctification. The great things, which believers have in possession, and the greater, which they have in hope, are the sustenance of their consolation <sup>g</sup>. The suitableness of those inestimable blessings to their hearts <sup>h</sup>, together with their sense of personal interest in them, affords them unspeakable joy <sup>i</sup>. As to their experiences and evidences of grace, these are, strictly speaking, *not grounds*, upon which they build their comfort <sup>k</sup>;

<sup>c</sup> Rom. v. 11.<sup>d</sup> Rom. viii. 34.<sup>e</sup> Isa. xii. 3. with<sup>f</sup> Ps. xix. 8. 1 John iii. 23.

lxvi. 11.

<sup>g</sup> Heb. vi. 18. <sup>h</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.<sup>i</sup> Luke i. 47.<sup>k</sup> Gal. vi. 14.

Prov. xiii. 12.

but they are *proofs*, of their saving interest in those grounds of consolation, above mentioned, as well as, *encouragements* to build their comfort upon them; and so, they are matter of consolation to their souls<sup>l</sup>. The most comfortable of the saints, are they who, trusting at all times in the second Adam, as given for a covenant to them, can think of all dispensations, of all conditions, and of all duties, with comfort<sup>m</sup>. They who have the love of Christ displayed in the covenant of grace, most constantly in their view, and most frequently warm on their heart; are of all believers, the most free from perplexing doubts and fears.

6. It is both *the duty and the privilege* of true believers, to attain spiritual consolation. It is their duty, for it is required of them in the law; and their privilege, for it is promised to them in the gospel.

It is the *duty* of all the saints, to be of good comfort. Their God, the God of consolation, would not have them to be, at any time, disconsolate or gloomy: and therefore he expressly forbiddeth them, to fear, to be discouraged, to let their heart be troubled, and to yield to oppressive grief. He saith to them, “Fear ye not, neither be afraid<sup>n</sup>.” “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God<sup>o</sup>.” “Fear not, for I have redeemed thee<sup>p</sup>.” And saith the Lord Jesus, “Fear not them which kill the body<sup>q</sup>.” “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be

<sup>l</sup> 2 Cor. i. 12.

• Isa. xli. 10.

<sup>m</sup> Isa. xxvi. 3.

<sup>p</sup> Isa. xliii. 1.

<sup>n</sup> Isa. xliv. 8.

<sup>q</sup> Matt. x. 28.

afraid<sup>r</sup>:" "Fear not; I am the first and the last<sup>s</sup>:"  
 "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer<sup>t</sup>." The apostle Paul forbids the believers in Thessalonica, to sorrow for deceased saints, as others who have no hope<sup>u</sup>. The Lord authorizeth no sorrow, but *godly* sorrow; which is consistent with holy joy, and tends to the increase of it. He forbiddeth his people, all oppressive grief, all desponding fear, and all perplexing trouble of mind, as hinderances to the exercise of love, and to the practice of holiness. He is displeased, when they suffer themselves to be uncomfortable in *his* service<sup>v</sup>, when they sit in sackcloth in *his* gate. He commands them, on the contrary, to rejoice before him. He hath made it their indispensable duty, to cast all their care upon him<sup>w</sup>; "to eat their bread with joy, and to drink their wine with a cheerful heart;" "to have their garments always white, and to let their head lack no ointment<sup>x</sup>." He delighteth to see them joyful, and to hear them singing in his righteous ways: and therefore his high command is, "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright<sup>y</sup>:" "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart<sup>z</sup>:" "Delight thyself also in the Lord<sup>b</sup>:" "Let all those that put their trust in thee, rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name,

<sup>r</sup> John xiv. 27.<sup>s</sup> Rev. i. 17.<sup>t</sup> Rev. ii. 10.<sup>u</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 13.<sup>w</sup> Mal. ii. 13.<sup>x</sup> 1 Pet. v. 7.<sup>y</sup> Eccles. ix. 7, 8.<sup>z</sup> Ps. xxxiii. 1.<sup>a</sup> Ps. xxxii. 11.<sup>b</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 4.

be joyful in thee <sup>c</sup>:" " Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven <sup>d</sup>:" " Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord <sup>e</sup>:" " Rejoice evermore <sup>f</sup>:" " Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, Rejoice <sup>g</sup>:" as if the apostle had said, ' I, in the most earnest and urgent manner, charge you to rejoice, not at some times only, but at *all* times; not only when upon the mount with God, but when in the valley; not merely when the Lord shineth upon you, but when he hides his face.' Although no affliction is so hard to bear, as the distress of soul, which the believer sometimes, when he is without comfort, endures; yet, that is but little, very little indeed, in comparison of the *sin*, of his disobeying God's authoritative command, by refusing to be comforted. It is remarkable that, though Asaph had, once and again, offered reasons of comfort to his troubled mind, as appears from his soul's refusing to be comforted; yet, he still persisted in refusing consolation, until he could say, " This is my *infirmity*," my sin, the distemper of unbelief in my heart; and *then*, he ceased to refuse it any longer <sup>h</sup>.

It is also the *privilege* of the saints, to have spiritual comfort. They have the beginnings of eternal life, and so have joy, as a part of it. It is their inestimable privilege, to have peace with God, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and to glory even in tribulation <sup>i</sup>. They have joy, with which, a stranger doth not intermeddle <sup>k</sup>. To them,

<sup>c</sup> Ps. v. 11.

<sup>d</sup> Matt. v. 12.

<sup>e</sup> Phil. iii. 1.

<sup>f</sup> 1 Thess. v. 16.

<sup>g</sup> Phil. iv. 4.

<sup>h</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 2—12.

<sup>i</sup> Rom. v. 1—3.

<sup>k</sup> Prov. xiv. 10.

“wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace<sup>1</sup>.” “My mouth,” says the holy Psalmist, “shall praise thee with joyful lips<sup>m</sup>.” “My lips shall greatly rejoice, when I sing unto thee; and my soul which thou hast redeemed<sup>n</sup>.” The apostle Paul, speaks of his having been filled with comfort; of his having been exceeding joyful in *all* his tribulation<sup>o</sup>; and of his having been sorrowful, yet *always* rejoicing<sup>p</sup>. “Blessed be the God of all comfort,” says he, “who comforteth us in *all* our tribulation<sup>q</sup>.” He doth not say, Who *hath* comforted, or, Who *will*, or, Who *can* comfort us, if it please him; but,—Who comforteth, Who *always* comforteth us. Neither doth he say, Who comforteth us in some, or in many tribulations; but, “Who comforteth us in *all* our tribulation,” of whatever kind or degree. Indeed, the Lord always comforteth his people, in a greater or less measure. He giveth them songs even in the night<sup>r</sup>.

7. Believers have always *the seed, or principle* of spiritual comfort, in them; but not always, *the sense or feeling* of consolation. As they have, at all times, ground of consolation, and must have it, so long as the everlasting covenant continues to be established with Christ, and with them in him<sup>s</sup>; so, they have always the seed and root of it, in their hearts. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness, for the upright in heart<sup>t</sup>.” Gladness

<sup>1</sup> Prov. iii. 17.

<sup>m</sup> Ps. lxiii. 5.

<sup>n</sup> Ps. lxxi. 23.

<sup>o</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 4.

<sup>p</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 10.

<sup>q</sup> 2 Cor. i. 3, 4.

<sup>r</sup> Job xxxv. 10.

<sup>s</sup> Isa. liv. 8—10. Ezek. xxxvii. 26.

<sup>t</sup> Ps. xcvi. 11.

is sown for the upright in heart; and though, like seed sown in winter, which lies long under the clod, it seems to be lost; yet, it is preserved, and it will in due season spring up to view, and yield a plentiful increase. Though the seed of consolation appointed for the saints, may lie covered for a time, yet it is not destroyed. Believers have at all times, the seed or principle, and also the habit of spiritual joy, in their hearts. Even in their deepest dejection, they have a seed of comfort that will spring up. The fruit of the Spirit in them, is joy and peace; and the Spirit as a Comforter, abideth with them for ever <sup>u</sup>. But although they always have the principle, yet they have not, at all times, the sensible enjoyment, of comfort. They do not continually, exercise the grace of joy; and therefore, they do not always see or feel in themselves, the principle and habit of that grace. It is, when they are *exercising* any grace of the Spirit, that they commonly perceive it. Their sensible enjoyment of consolation in this life, is often interrupted, by the remaining corruptions of their nature, by the fiery darts of the wicked one, and by the hidings of God's countenance from them. In interrupting their sensible comfort, they themselves have a *sinful* hand <sup>w</sup>; Satan and his instruments, have a *malicious* hand <sup>x</sup>; and the Lord, in order to manifest his sovereignty, to chasten them for their sins, to try and exercise their graces, to excite their more earnest prayers, and to teach them to improve for the future the sense of his favour,

<sup>u</sup> John xiv. 16.

<sup>w</sup> Jer. ii. 17, 19. Isa. lxiii. 10.

<sup>x</sup> 1 Pet. v. 8.

bath a *holy* hand <sup>1</sup>. Hence, though the believer is, sometimes, lively, and in his exercise of faith and love, feels at his heart, a glow of heavenly joy; yet, at other times, he is languid, cold, and in a great degree disconsolate. Like Hagar at the well, his eyes are so held, that he cannot perceive as formerly, his grounds of comfort; and then, his day of gladness, is turned into a night of heaviness <sup>2</sup>.

8. The *peculiar seasons*, in which, actual and *sensible* comfort is commonly afforded to believers, are the following:

The time of some special manifestation of redeeming love to the soul, after a dark night of desertion <sup>3</sup>; the season of God's appearing remarkably for his church <sup>4</sup>; when some heavy trial is approaching, in order to fortify their minds to endure it <sup>5</sup>; in, and especially after, a time of deep affliction <sup>6</sup>; the time of tribulation, for the cause of Christ and his gospel <sup>7</sup>; often, about the time of their first conversion <sup>8</sup>; the season in which, the ordinances of the gospel, are administered to them, with uncommon liveliness <sup>9</sup>; frequently, at the season of much humiliation, sorrow <sup>10</sup>, and melting

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxx. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lam. v. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxx. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Exod. xv. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Acts xxvii. 24. Isa. liv. 7, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Isa. xliii. 2. Ps. xciv. 19. and cxii. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xvi. 25. 2 Cor. i. 4, 5. <sup>8</sup> Luke xv. 22—24.

<sup>9</sup> Isa. lvi. 7.

<sup>10</sup> A good man who, lying upon his bed of sickness, was once asked, Which were the most comfortable days, that ever he enjoyed? cried out, in his artless manner, 'O give me my *mourning days*; give me my mourning days again; for they were the joyfulest days, that ever I had.' BROOKS' Cabinet, p. 242.



of heart for sin<sup>l</sup>; the time in which, they are more than ordinarily engaged in the exercise of grace, and practice of duty, and especially, when they are conflicting much, with the corruptions of their heart<sup>k</sup>; after sharp conflicts with sin or temptation, from which, they have come off victorious<sup>l</sup>; the season in which, the Lord is calling them to some extraordinary service, for which, they need special encouragement<sup>m</sup>; the time in which, they see and find *least* comfort in creatures, or in which, they are destitute of creature-comforts, and are enabled more than usually to despise them, in comparison of Christ and God in him; the season in which, the Lord confers upon them, some remarkable and unexpected favour<sup>n</sup>; and the time in which, they employ themselves in fixed and deep meditation on the adorable Redeemer, and his glorious grace<sup>o</sup>. These are, for the most part, the *ordinary* seasons of sensible comfort, to the saints. But, as the Lord is infinitely sovereign, wise, and gracious, in dispensing his blessings to them; there are also some extraordinary seasons of rejoicing; some ineffable glances of light, upon their souls, which penetrate, transform, and fill them with rapturous and inexpressible joy.

9. The comfort which the Lord bestoweth, is, in every instance, *the most suitable* to the present necessity of the believer. “As thy days,” saith Moses, “so shall thy strength be<sup>p</sup>.” The Chris-

<sup>l</sup> Dan. ix. 21—23. Jer. xxxi. 18—20. <sup>k</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

<sup>l</sup> Rev. ii. 17. <sup>m</sup> Gen. xiii. 15, 16. and xvi. 3, 4.

<sup>n</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 1—10. Luke i. 46, 47. <sup>o</sup> Ps. civ. 34.

<sup>p</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 25.

tion's comforts are wisely and wonderfully adapted to the nature, degree, and continuance, of his grievances. When he has the most discouragement without, he has usually the most consolation within: when the Lord Jesus giveth him least of creature-comfort, he commonly affords him most of himself, as the Consolation of Israel. He seldom allows him, much of the fatness of the earth, and of refreshment from above, at once; but when he shatteth before him, all doors of help from this world, he openeth to him the doors of heaven. It was only, when the Martyr Stephen saw nothing but death for him in this world, that he saw "the heavens opened, and the Son of man, standing on the right hand of God <sup>a</sup>." When the Lord bringeth his people into outward straits, he commonly favours them with inward enlargements: when he putteth a cup of affliction into their hands, he usually giveth them a cup of consolation. "Will he plead against me, saith Job, with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me <sup>b</sup>." The Lord Jesus said to Paul, when he was afflicted by a thorn in the flesh, "My strength is made perfect in weakness <sup>c</sup>." The time, in which, believers are most sensible of their utter inability, to resist and overcome their corruptions, or temptations, and are most engaged in relying on their great Redeemer, for strength; is the season, in which, by supporting and strengthening them, He usually affords them, the most illustrious displays of the perfection of his strength. In proportion as their weakness appears to them, will his strength

<sup>a</sup> Acts vii. 56.

<sup>b</sup> Job xxiii. 6.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 9.

appear perfect, in comforting or strengthening their souls, under that weakness. Accordingly, the apostle in another place saith, “As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” The comfort afforded to the saints, is admirably fitted and proportioned, to their sufferings in conformity to Christ, and especially, to their sufferings for him. If the one aboundeth, so does the other, and that, in the most suitable and exact proportion. If gall be dropped into their cup, a suitable proportion of sweetness, will also be infused; so that, their affliction will be *in measure* <sup>u</sup>. If they be under various troubles, and trust in Christ, he hath various comforts for them: if they labour under powerful evils, he hath strong consolations; if, under new afflictions, he hath new comforts; if, under small grievances, he hath small degrees of support to bestow; if, under great perplexities, he hath great measures of consolation to impart; if, in deep distresses, he hath deep comforts, comforts, that will sink to the very centre of the soul; and if, under continued trials, whether external or internal, he hath continued, yea, everlasting consolations, to give them. He “will not suffer them to be tempted, above that they are able; but will with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it <sup>w</sup>.” He will either bring down the trial to their strength, or bring up their strength to the trial. If, accordingly, their holy consolation be at any time small; it is because they are then not exposed, as at other times, either to outward tempta-

<sup>z</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5.

<sup>u</sup> Isa. xxvii. 8.

<sup>w</sup> 1 Cor. x. 13.

tions, or to inward conflicts. So long as believers are liable to yield to the prevalence of unbelief, pride, indolence, an inordinate attachment to earthly things, and a legal temper; the Lord is pleased to bestow or suspend, to restore or increase, spiritual consolation, at such seasons, and in such degrees, as he sees most suitable, to prevent or control those evils, and to promote the increase of holiness in their souls<sup>x</sup>. Seeing true comfort is an inward strengthening of the soul, against trouble felt or feared, it must, as was hinted above, be stronger than the trouble, else the act of comforting will not follow. If the comfort be not above the uneasiness, it is no longer comfort. No comforts, therefore, but such as are *Divine*, can refresh the holy soul under trouble; because, in all other comforts, the disease is above the remedy. Believers should never be discouraged; in the prospect even of the highest degree of affliction; for the spiritual comfort, will be so adapted to the trouble, as to rise above, and prevail over it<sup>y</sup>. It is therefore better for them, to have the consolation, than to be exempted from the trouble, and to want the consolation. This is one special advantage of an afflicted condition, to the saints, that the Lord Jesus pities them most, and comforts them most, in that condition. It is commonly, when Satan, or the world, or the flesh, is most bitter to them, that he and his grace are most sweet. Indeed, his sharpest dispensations would often be his sweetest, if they but knew better, how to improve them.

10. The spiritual comfort of the saints, is accord-

<sup>x</sup> Ezek. xxxiv. 16.

<sup>y</sup> Ps. xciv. 19.

ing to their faith. "According to your faith," said the Lord Jesus, "be it unto you <sup>2</sup>."

It is according to the strength of their faith. If a man's faith be weak, his consolation is weak and unstable. In some happy moment, he may, indeed, feel a sudden transport of joy; but still, he has very little solid or lasting consolation. Doubts, fears, and perplexities, will often prevail against the peace of his mind. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith <sup>3</sup>?" That which usually stands between a Christian, and the joy of God's salvation, is his being unwilling to come anew, as a sinner, to Christ. So long as this is the case, any small degree of consolation that he may have, will rise and fall, according to his frames or feelings. But, if his faith be strong, though he may not have rapturous joy, yet his consolation will usually be strong <sup>4</sup>; if stable, his peace of conscience will also be stable. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid <sup>5</sup>." Faith is not only a spiritual grace, but is the spirit of every other grace, and especially of joy. Spiritual joy is "the joy of faith <sup>6</sup>;" for it proceeds from faith, as its principle. It is the office of faith, to take, and to hand, comfort to the soul; to bring peace into the conscience, and joy into the heart. If direct and firm reliance on the Saviour increases, slavish fear subsides, and settled comfort ensues. Sense looketh upon the face, the external conduct of Jesus Christ; but faith, especially strong faith, looketh upon his heart, as discovering itself

<sup>2</sup> Matth. ix. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Matth. viii. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. vi. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. cxii. 7, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Phil. i. 25.

in the sure, the unchangeable promise; and seeth inward affections of love and mercy, even under outward expressions of displeasure. Faith, when it is strong, can look through a thick cloud of desertion, and discern the affection of a Father, under the appearance of an enemy<sup>c</sup>.

It is also according to *the exercise* of their faith, that believers are comforted. If the Christian seldom exercises faith, his consolation is proportionably small: if he exercises it frequently, and rather because it is his *duty*, than merely because he is impelled to it by a painful sense of need, his holy consolation is, in proportion, great. The more frequently, and simply, he acteth faith on Christ the Consolation of Israel, as the object thereof, and on the good tidings of great joy to all people, as the ground of it; the more, will he have the comfort of being conscious, that he has the grace of faith. Besides, the more cordially and frequently he exerciseth faith, the more of spiritual pleasure, will he enjoy: for, to trust cordially that, Jesus loveth and saveth me, and that, he will save me with an everlasting salvation, is in itself, a delightful, a cheering persuasion. Moreover, faith is the instrument, by which, the believer received consolation at first, and by which, he continues to receive it still. It is, by trusting daily in the Lord Jesus, for all his salvation, of which, holy consolation is a part; that the Christian derives daily, renewed supplies of spiritual consolation, from his fulness. The more frequent, and simple, and lively, his actings of confidence in his gracious Redeemer, are; the more of

<sup>c</sup> Isa. viii. 17. Job xiii. 15.

holy comfort, will he in every time of need receive. To feel comfortable, when he is conscious that, he has clear evidences of his vital union with Christ, is a duty ; but, to take his comfort fresh from the fountain, by the direct application and particular trust of faith, is still a greater duty ; a duty, by which he glorifies his faithful Redeemer more, and receives an increase of pure and solid consolation. Hence, are these cheering passages of Scripture : “ I had fainted, unless I had *believed to see the goodness of the Lord, in the land of the living* <sup>f</sup>.” “ I have *trusted in thy mercy, my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation* <sup>g</sup>.” “ Let *not* your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, *believe also in me* <sup>h</sup>.” “ Now the God of hope, fill you with all *joy and peace in believing* <sup>i</sup>.” “ We who have *believed* do enter into *rest* <sup>k</sup>.” Although the sight of his evidences of grace, is indeed pleasant to a holy man; yet the sight of Christ, in the offer and promise, should be much more delightful to him. Unbelief and a legal spirit, will dispose a man always to look for something in himself, as his ground of comfort; but a holy faith, will have to do with none but Christ. Nothing is such a delight to the Lord Jesus; because nothing honours him so much, as direct and unsuspecting confidence in him, for salvation. Whereas, looking to him, or looking upon him, through one’s own graces and frames, reflects much dishonour upon him. The man, who so looks upon him, is like one who sees the sun reflected by water; which appears to move or waver, as much as the surface of the water does.

<sup>f</sup> Ps. xxvii. 13.

<sup>g</sup> Ps. xiii. 5.

<sup>h</sup> John. xiv. 1.

<sup>i</sup> Rom. xv. 13.

<sup>k</sup> Heb. iv. 3.

11. The *properties* of spiritual consolation, by which; it is distinguished from the joy of the hypocrite, are these :—

True comfort cometh by the *word* of God, and that rightly understood <sup>1</sup>; but delusive joy comes, either by impressions without the word, or by a misunderstanding of the word. True consolation is *real* and *solid*. The sadness of the believer is, as it were, but as seeming sadness; whereas his joy is real. “As sorrowful,” saith Paul, “yet always rejoicing<sup>m</sup>.” The hypocrite, on the contrary, is only in appearance joyful; whilst he is in reality gloomy and sorrowful<sup>n</sup>. Spiritual comfort goes to *the heart*, and inspires it with holy delight: it is solid, and dwells more in the heart, than in the countenance. But delusive joy floats on the surface, makes a loud noise, and is, therefore, compared to “the crackling of thorns under a pot<sup>o</sup>.” True comfort, with regard to its object, is a rejoicing more in the *amiable-ness and excellence* of Christ, manifested, than in the manifestation of them<sup>p</sup>; but counterfeit joy, is a rejoicing more in the manifestation itself, than in the excellence of the Divine object, manifested. The true Christian, rejoices most in the holy, and amiable nature of the things of Christ: the formalist, delights most in his own pretended interest in those things. That which delights him, is not so much the beauty of the Lord, as the beauty of his own experience. The delight, which the believer taketh in the Lord, and in his word, is his *chief* delight, his *exceeding* joy<sup>q</sup>. The dearest delights of

<sup>1</sup> 1 John i. 4.      <sup>m</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 10.      <sup>n</sup> Prov. xiv. 13.

<sup>o</sup> Eccles. vii. 6.      <sup>p</sup> Phil. iii. 3.

<sup>q</sup> Ps. xliii. 4. and iv. 6, 7. and xix. 10.



nature, are, in his estimation, infinitely below Christ, and God in Him. The presence and enjoyment of Christ will, in his esteem, supply the want of all other comforts. But, the chief delight of the hypocrite, is not in the Lord, but in some other object. True consolation usually accompanies, or follows, *godly sorrow* for sin<sup>r</sup>; but the joy of the empty formalist, springs up quickly, and without contrition of heart<sup>s</sup>. If the hypocrite but offer to mourn for sin, it will effectually hinder his rejoicing in God. The godly sorrow of the believer, will be matter of *joy* to him: he rejoices more, when his heart is melting for sin, than he would do, though he had all the carnal delights in the world. On the contrary, the delusive joy of the formalist, will, either in time or in eternity, be matter of *sorrow* to him<sup>t</sup>. True comfort is *hidden* from unregenerate men<sup>u</sup>. It is as far out of the reach of worldly men, to discern the spiritual joy of a saint; as it is out of their power, to prevent, or to remove it. The consolation of the sincere Christian, is *unspeakable*<sup>v</sup>; and no wonder; for the matter, and the importance of it, are incomprehensible; but the greatest joy of the hypocrite and the worldling, can easily be told: it can, without difficulty, be expressed to the utmost of its value. True consolation, is *glorified* or *glorious* joy<sup>x</sup>: it has the highest and most glorious object; and it is the beginning as well as the earnest, of glory in the soul: counterfeit joy, on the con-

<sup>r</sup> Matth. v. 4. Isa. lvii. 15. John xvi. 20.

Matth. xiii. 20. w. th Jer. iv. 3.

<sup>t</sup> Prov. xiv. 13.

<sup>u</sup> Prov. xiv. 10.

<sup>v</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.

<sup>x</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.

trary, is base and inglorious. The consolation of the believer is *holy*: it hath a holy, a sanctifying influence upon his soul<sup>1</sup>. It disposes him to practise willingly and cheerfully, universal holiness. It strengthens, encourages, and enlivens his heart, in holy obedience<sup>2</sup>. It invigorates him for it: it excites him to it. But the joy of the hypocrite is unholy: it leaves his heart, as carnal, and his life, as unholy as ever; nay, it strengthens his lusts, and encourages him in sloth, and in the practice of some secret iniquity<sup>3</sup>. True comfort *humbles* the sincere Christian, and lays him in the dust at the footstool of a God of infinite holiness, and sovereign grace<sup>4</sup>; but counterfeit joy, puffs up the empty formalist, with pride and self-conceit<sup>5</sup>. Pure consolation, is accompanied with a constant *fear of displeasing* the Lord<sup>6</sup>; but delusive joy, is connected with no fear, except that of *suffering* from him. Spiritual comfort cannot be maintained, without a holy *tenderness of conscience*, and a constant *struggle* against all manner of sin<sup>7</sup>; but carnal and hypocritical joy is preserved, without either the one or the other. True consolation, renders every sin more and more hateful<sup>8</sup>; but counterfeit joy, leaves the hypocrite under the reigning love of all iniquity, and especially, of some darling sin. Holy comfort, disposes the believer to the frequent exercise of impartial *self-examination*<sup>9</sup>; but delusive joy, inclines and encourages

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 18. Phil. iii. 3.<sup>2</sup> Neh. viii. 10.<sup>3</sup> Luke: xi. 21.<sup>4</sup> Job xlii. 5, 6. 1 Cor. xv. 10.<sup>5</sup> Isa. lviii. 2, 3.<sup>6</sup> Gen. xxxix. 9. Matth. xxviii. 8.<sup>7</sup> 1 John iii. 3.<sup>8</sup> Rom. vii. 22, 24. Ps. cxix. 128.<sup>9</sup> Ps. xxvi. 1—3.

the hypocrite to neglect that exercise <sup>b</sup>. In a word, True consolation is *permanent* <sup>1</sup>. It is by the Holy Spirit so fixed in the heart, that it can never be wholly removed; and it is so strong, that it swallows up almost, all matter of unwarrantable fear and grief. Indeed, when the believer hath lost all sight of his personal interest in the Saviour, he cannot, as formerly, exercise his joy in God, and cannot, in such a case, but lose the sense of that joy, even while the principle and habit of it still remain. But, though the hypocrite's persuasion of his pretended interest in the Divine favour, continues; yet his joy ceases: his sense of that interest, becomes insipid to him <sup>k</sup>.

12. In proportion to the *degree* of holy consolation that is afforded the believer, *his duty is his delight*. Being renewed in the spirit of his mind, the more clearly and spiritually, he discerns the loveliness of God in Christ, and the more cordially and firmly, he believes his love to him; the more doth he love God <sup>1</sup>, and the more he loveth God, the more he delighteth in Him. In proportion also, as he spiritually discerns the infinite amiableness of the holiness, and the other perfections of God, and believes with application his redeeming love; he, in the same proportion, approves Him, and the manifestations of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ: but the more he approves, or is pleased with God, as gloriously manifested in Christ, the more delight does he take in him. Add to this, that the more he is enabled to trust cordially, that

<sup>b</sup> John iii. 20, 21.

<sup>1</sup> John xvi. 22.

<sup>k</sup> Job xx. 5.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 19.

God in Christ loveth him, and that He is not his enemy, but his Friend and his Father; the more of spiritual comfort, he will have; and the more of that holy consolation he has, which is a rejoicing in the Lord, the more will he delight in him, as his own God and Father. Now, in proportion as the believer is enabled to *love*, to be *pleased with*, and to *rejoice in* God, through the Lord Jesus Christ; he is at the same time, enabled to delight in the infinite *holiness* of God, as his God in Christ, and in all the illustrious displays of it, which, especially in redemption, are afforded him <sup>m</sup>. And because the moral law, in the hand of the glorious Mediator, is a fair transcript of God's holiness, and a declaration of his will, the believer delighteth also in that law, after the inward man <sup>n</sup>. He loveth it, because it is holy and just <sup>o</sup>; and he consents unto it, that it is good <sup>p</sup>. In the same degree, then, in which a holy man is delighted or comforted, by a spiritual discovery of the transcendent loveliness of Jehovah, and by a firm belief of his infinite love to him; does he delight in his holy commandments: but, the more he delights in the commandments of the Lord, the more pleasure doth he take, in spiritual and universal obedience to them <sup>q</sup>. His heart is united to the will, and to the glory, of his redeeming God: and, the more he is refreshed by the holy consolations of the gospel, or enabled to rejoice in Christ Jesus and his great salvation; so much the more doth he delight in evangelical obedience to his will,

<sup>m</sup> Ps. cxxxviii. 5.  
7—10, and cxix. 97.

<sup>n</sup> Rom. vii. 22.

<sup>p</sup> Rom. vii. 16.

<sup>o</sup> Ps. xix.

<sup>q</sup> Ps. xix. 11.

and in holy activity for his glory. The more his heart is comforted, the more will it be a comfort to him, to mortify sin, and to practise holiness; the more uniformly, will he rejoice in all opportunities of doing good, and the more ardently, will he seize them<sup>r</sup>. Beholding the transcendent beauty of the Lord, and trusting that, in Christ, this God is his God, and that, he loveth him with an everlasting love; the believer delights, to think and speak of Him, to adore and serve him, and in all things, to resign himself to his blessed will. Anointed with the oil of gladness, and refreshed with the sweetness of redeeming mercy, he delights, in imitation of his great Redeemer, to do the will of God, and accounts no pleasure under the sun, equal to that of doing good. Could he be more holy, and spiritually minded, it would please him better, than though he possessed all the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world. The more his holy soul is invigorated with spiritual consolation, the more active and cheerful he is, in all his duties; for in proportion as he delights in them, they are easy to him<sup>s</sup>. Indeed, holy living usually begins with comfort, and is maintained by it. The method of grace, as revealed by the gospel, is, to comfort our hearts, and thereby, to establish us in every good word and work<sup>t</sup>.

13. Finally, The Lord usually dispenseth *consolation and affliction alternately*, to his people; in order that, they may neither be too much depressed, nor too much elated. The apostle Paul informs

<sup>r</sup> Prov. iii. 17.

<sup>s</sup> Ps. xxv. 13. Matt. xi. 30.

<sup>t</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 17.

as that, "lest he should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations," which had, in an extraordinary manner, been afforded him, "there was given to him, a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him <sup>u</sup>." In order that he might not, through the vanity and deceitfulness of his heart, be elated with an unbecoming conceit of himself, as if he were better than other apostles, because of the abundance of the revelations, with which he had been favoured; the Lord employed means the most effectual, to keep him humble. He permitted Satan and his instruments, to afflict him, either in his soul or body, or perhaps in both, and that, in a manner very abasing and grievous to him. But, that the holy apostle might not be too much cast down, by this painful affliction, the Redeemer, in answer to his prayer, comforted him with this gracious promise; "My grace is sufficient for thee <sup>w</sup>." We read also that, the Lord shewed David, at one time, great and sore troubles, but enabled him to trust, that he would, at another, quicken him, and comfort him on every side <sup>x</sup>. A Prophet, personating the ancient church in her captivity, says, "Thou hast lifted me up and cast me down <sup>y</sup>." The believer, then, while he is in this world, has cloudy and clear days, tempestuous and calm seasons. He is at one time, in the valley of tears, and at another, on the mountain of joy. His gifts, his prosperity, and in consequence of these, his danger of carnal security, are sometimes so great, that the Lord, in

<sup>u</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 7.

<sup>w</sup> Ver. 9.

<sup>x</sup> Ps. lxxi. 20, 21.

<sup>y</sup> Ps. cii. 10.

order to prevent his being intoxicated, seeth it necessary to mingle water with his wine. He sees, it may be, that when the outward path of the Christian is smooth, he is not, in such a case, fit to be trusted with inward consolation, except in a small measure. He, therefore, in his infinite wisdom and love, varies his dispensations to the believer. By a wise interchange of adversity and prosperity, he sets trouble and comfort, for the most part, the one, over against the other<sup>2</sup>; that the one may be a foil to the other; that the Christian may find a short, an easy, and a safe passage between them; that in adversity, "he may weep, as though he wept not," and in prosperity, "rejoice, as though he rejoiced not<sup>2</sup>." Indeed, so long as sin remaineth in the believer, he must, in order to grow in grace, have distress and comfort, either alternately, or both together; to the end that, when he is sorrowful, he may not be cast down too low, and that, when he is rejoicing, he may not be lifted up too high.

ARE Christ and God in Christ, together with his grace, mercy, and truth, as hath been said above, *the primary grounds* of a saints comfort and hope? I hence infer that, his manifold infirmities and deficiencies, in his exercise of grace and performance of duty, should *at no time discourage him*. Believer, thy remaining darkness, deadness, carnality, weakness, and indisposition of spirit for holy exercises, should indeed occasion in thy soul, much godly sorrow and self-loathing; but, they should never discourage thee in thy holy endeavours, nor cause thee to despond. They should not make

<sup>2</sup> Eccles. vii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 30.

thee distrust thy faithful Redeemer, or doubt of any promised blessing ; because thy title to grace and glory, is not founded on thy own performances, but on the consummate righteousness of the Lord Jesus ; and thy *exercise* of hope, should be suitable to the *grounds* of thy hope. Be not disquieted, then, though thou feelest the corruption of thy nature, strong and active ; while thou findest, at the same time, thy renewed nature, striving in opposition to it, and mourning under a painful sense of it. Unbelieving discouragement, arising from a sense either of sins or of wants, of desertions or of temptations, will weaken thy hands, and indispose thy heart for spiritual obedience<sup>b</sup>. It was when Peter began to fear, that he began to sink in the water.

Doth the Lord Jesus, usually afford inward and *sensible* comfort to his children, about the time of their first conversion ? They may see in this, an illustrious display of his manifold *wisdom*, as well as of his redeeming *love* to them. One thing that he designs by this, is, that they may perceive as early as possible, the inexpressible advantages, that they have gained by the gracious change, which his Holy Spirit hath produced in them ; and thereby be encouraged, as well as inclined, so to run the race that is set before them, as to attain the prize of inexpressible and endless joy, in his immediate presence. For, having marrow and fatness in their Father's house, instead of husks in a far country ; spiritual and substantial delights, instead of pleasures that are carnal and empty ; they cannot, even at the beginning of their Chris-

<sup>b</sup> 1 Sam. xii. 20. Heb. xii. 12, 13.



tian course, but acknowledge themselves already unspeakable gainers.

Is spiritual joy *required* of believers, in the law, and *promised* to them, in the gospel; and is the Lord *displeased*, when they appear uncomfortable in his service? Let them hence learn that it is their *duty*, at all times, and in all conditions, to be of good comfort; and that it is their sin, to neglect this part of their duty, at any time, or on any account. Consider, believer, that thou art *commanded* to “be of good courage,” yea, to “rejoice in the Lord *always*.” Rely then, upon the promise of the gospel, in order to obey this precept of the law. Trust firmly, that Jesus the Consolation of Israel, will according to his promise, comfort thee in every time of need; and, in the faith of the promise, as well as in obedience to the precept, endeavour frequently to rejoice in Him, and in God as thy God through him. Exercise daily, in dependance on the promise, the grace of holy joy; not so much, because it will afford pleasure to thyself, as, because it is a *duty*, which thou art commanded by thy God and Redeemer, always to perform. If thou allow thyself to neglect, for a season, any duty, and especially *this* one; thou must not be surprised, if thou soon lose thy present comfort.

Is spiritual consolation or joy, a part of *life*, of *eternal* life? Hence, I may justly infer that, it is a slandering of true religion, to say or insinuate, that it *deprives* persons of the comfort of life. Nothing can be more false. None in the world, hath such good reason to rejoice, as the true Chris-

tian. If a holy man appear at any time to be sad, it is not because he is religious, but because he is not more religious. The more holiness, he attains, the more pure consolation, does he enjoy. It is true, he will take no more pleasure in sin; but, instead of that, he will have peace with God, and the joy of his salvation. It is far from being Christ's design, to deprive him of pleasure; but only, to determine and enable him so to consult his own happiness, in subservience to the glory of God, as to exchange sinful and mean, for spiritual and noble pleasures<sup>d</sup>. He accordingly experiences such delight, in the ways of holiness, as he never enjoyed, nor could enjoy, in the ways of sin. "A stranger doth not intermeddle with *his* joy<sup>e</sup>." The believer knows by experience, that there is more joy, even in penitential mourning for sin, than in all the mirth of the most prosperous sinner. He findeth such a secret sweetness in his godly sorrow, that instead of desiring, he rather fears, the removal of that sorrow.

Is the comfort, with which the saints are favoured, *spiritual and holy* comfort? Let no man then conclude, that he is a true Christian, merely because he has felt on some occasions, *natural and sensible* consolation. Natural, outward, and sensible consolation is one thing; spiritual, inward, and holy comfort is another, and a very different thing. The former, is natural, and is common both to saints and sinners; the latter, is spiritual, and is peculiar only to the saints: that, is outward and sensitive, proceeding, under common providential

<sup>d</sup> Prov. iii. 17.<sup>e</sup> Prov. xiv. 10.

influence, from a man's natural constitution of body; this, is inward and holy, and is effected by the Holy Spirit the Comforter, dwelling in the soul. Spiritual consolation is sometimes sensible, as well as that which is natural; or rather, the former might (as it sometimes is) be styled, sensible consolation, and the latter, sensitive delight. Spiritual comfort, delights chiefly the rational and inward faculties of the soul; natural comfort, pleases only the outward and sensitive faculties of it, namely, the imagination, the natural spirits, and even the external senses. The former, is wrought in the heart, by the Holy Spirit, according to the word, spiritually understood and believed; the latter, is often produced by the external manner of the reader or preacher of the word; such as, his elocution, tone, and action. Persons of a soft natural constitution of body, have this sensitive delight, oftener, and in greater measure, than they of a contrary temperament. When the one, is enjoyed by the saints, they commonly can assign some reason for it; when the other, is felt by persons of any description, they usually can give no reason for the delightful sensation; but only that, something they know not what, has made a pleasing impression upon them. Spiritual comfort, is the opposite of trouble of mind on spiritual accounts; natural comfort, is the opposite of melancholy, which is a bodily disease: the former, as I already observed, is the special work of the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of sincere believers; the latter, proceeds from natural and external causes; and it is often raised by Satan, in order to confirm sinners in their delusion and hypocrisy. The

hypocrites in Zion, mentioned by Isaiah <sup>f</sup>, “took delight in approaching to God;” and the hearers compared by our Lord to the stony ground, “immediately received the word with gladness <sup>g</sup>.” Thus it appears, that thousands of men and women, whose unholy lives, demonstrate them to be utter strangers to spiritual and holy consolation, have, nevertheless, on some occasions, much natural and sensible delight. Let no man therefore conclude, that he is a true Christian, merely because he has felt much sensible, and even transporting joy; for his joy may be nothing but a natural sensation.

Once more: Is holy consolation *peculiar* to holy persons? Then it doth *not* belong to unholy men. The same spiritual comfort, that the saints have received, is, in the gospel, offered freely to thee who livest in the love and practice of some known sin; and the authentic offer, affords thee a warrant to receive it; but no warrant, to receive it separate from Christ, or otherwise than by receiving him, with his righteousness and salvation. It, indeed, affords thee a right to trust in the Lord Jesus, for all his salvation, and for holy consolation as a part of it; but, no right to trust that he will give thee comfort, apart from salvation; no warrant to trust that he will afford thee spiritual consolation, in the love and practice of any iniquity. Thou canst “not rejoice for joy, as other people;” for thou hast no personal interest in Jesus, the Consolation of Israel. Alas! there is not, and there never was, the smallest drop of spiritual con-

<sup>f</sup> Isa. lviii. 2.

<sup>g</sup> Mark iv. 16.

solation, in thy heart. Thou hast comfort from the creature, but none from the Redeemer: thou canst not have it from him, for thou delightest in sinning against him. The Lord saith to thee, and to all the other servants of sin, "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit <sup>a</sup>." Thou now lovest vanity, and rejoicest in iniquity; but the day is coming, when, if sovereign grace do not prevent it, "thy laughter shall be turned to mourning, and thy joy, to heaviness." Ah! how depraved is thy heart, when it can take pleasure in sin; but, no pleasure in Christ, or in holiness! what a reproach is it to thy understanding and will, to love darkness rather than light, to choose death rather than life! How deep is the corruption of thy nature, when thou canst love sin, which is altogether hateful, infinitely hateful; and hate Christ and holiness, which are altogether lovely! when thou canst take delight in the worst of things, but none in the best! what ignorance and enmity against God, hast thou hitherto shewn, by standing aloof from holiness, lest it should deprive thee of thy delight in sin! Thou now sayest, of the holy exercises of private and public worship, in which, the saints enjoy delightful communion with their God and Saviour, "Behold what a weariness is it!" But take heed, lest thou provoke the holy Majesty of heaven, to

<sup>a</sup> Isa. lxx. 13, 14.

cast thee into that place of eternal torment, where thou wilt have sufficient cause to be weary. O sinner, the Lord Jesus, who is infinitely excellent and amiable, immensely full of grace and consolation, now offereth himself, and all that he is and hath, to thee as an undone sinner of mankind; and with inexpressible tenderness, he inviteth thee to accept him, and to trust and delight in him. He saith to sinners in common, who read and hear his blessed gospel, "Come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price. Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David<sup>1</sup>." It will be impossible for thee, to experience true consolation, until thou comply with this gracious, this cheering invitation.

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## CHAPTER II.

OF THE GREAT IMPORTANCE AND USEFULNESS OF  
SPIRITUAL COMFORT, TO THE SAINTS.

THE high importance and utility of spiritual consolation, in qualifying believers for the lively exercise of their graces, and the spiritual performance of their duties, will appear, if the following particulars be considered:

1. It is of such unspeakable consequence to them,

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lv. 1, 2, 3.

that the eternal Father hath, in the greatness of his love, *sent* his only begotten Son into the world, with a commission to *purchase* it for them. The Father, according to his eternal covenant with the Son as last Adam, sent him, in order that he might bear their griefs, and carry their sorrows; and so might, at the infinite expense of his unparalleled anguish, agony, and death, purchase for them, the comfort which they, in the first Adam, had forfeited. He sent his only, his dear Son, to endure the pains of eternal death for them, that they might enjoy, in union with Him, the comfort of eternal life; that they might enter into Zion, with songs of triumph in their lips, and with everlasting joy on their heads. The Lord Jesus himself hath declared, that the comforting of mourners in Zion, was a principal object of his mission into the world. “The Spirit of the Lord God,” saith he, “is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted;...to comfort all that mourn; to give unto them that mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness <sup>k</sup>.” The Father hath also exalted him, in the human nature, to universal dominion; on purpose that, he might dispense the comfort of salvation, to all who should believe in him. Accordingly, when he was about to leave the world, the legacy which he left to his disciples, was comfort <sup>l</sup>. He promised that, their sorrow should be turned into joy; and that, in him, they should have peace, when, in the world, they

<sup>k</sup> Isa. lxi. 1—3.

<sup>l</sup> John xiv. 27.

should have tribulation <sup>m</sup>. So great is the importance of Divine consolation to the saints, and to the glory of God in their salvation; that the Father and the Son, send the Holy Spirit, to apply it to their souls. The Spirit, accordingly, testifieth of Christ <sup>n</sup>; witnesseth their adoption into the family of God; and seals them to the day of redemption. In performing these offices, he invigorates and cheers their hearts. Nay, so important, so excellent, is spiritual comfort, in the estimation of God, that God the Father, assumeth this title, “The God of consolation <sup>o</sup>,” “The God of all comfort <sup>p</sup>.” God the Son, is styled, “The Consolation of Israel <sup>q</sup>,” and God the adorable Spirit, is distinguished by this cheering title, “The Comforter <sup>r</sup>.” In few words, so high is the value, which the Lord setteth upon holy comfort, that he gives this solemn charge to the ministers of his word: “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not <sup>s</sup>.” Do men set such a high value upon *earthly* comforts, as to pursue, with unwearied diligence, the enjoyment of them? With what incomparably higher esteem, should believers regard heavenly consolations, in which, the infinite excellence of redeeming grace, is displayed with transcendent lustre <sup>t</sup>!”

2. Spiritual consolation is of such high importance, as to form *an essential part of that eternal life*, which God who cannot lie, promised before the

<sup>m</sup> John xvi. 20, 33.

<sup>n</sup> John xv. 26.

<sup>o</sup> Rom. xv. 5.

<sup>p</sup> 2 Cor. i. 3.

<sup>q</sup> Luke ii. 25.

<sup>r</sup> John xvi. 7.

<sup>s</sup> Isa. xxxv. 3, 4.

<sup>t</sup> Job xv. 11.



world began. That it is a part of eternal life, was evinced above. Comfort or joy, is so essential a part of life eternal in heaven, that heaven itself is, in scripture, styled *Joy* <sup>u</sup>. To enter into heaven, is, to enter into joy, the joy of the Lord Jesus. If then, fulness of joy is a necessary part of eternal life, as consummated in heaven; doubtless joy, though in an inferior degree, is a part of the same eternal life, as begun upon earth. Now, doth spiritual consolation form a part, even of life eternal? Is it necessary to holiness and happiness, not only as a means to the end, but, by a nobler kind of necessity, as a part of the end itself? How unspeakably important, then, how divinely excellent, must it be! It is supernatural, spiritual, and Divine; and, therefore, is of a nature inconceivably more pure, sublime, and ennobling, than any natural delight, any earthly joy. Instead of corrupting and debasing the soul, as carnal joys frequently do, it beautifies and dignifies it. So highly important in our view, is even earthly comfort or joy, that, as Chrysostom says, ‘We do all in order that we may joy.’ But creature-comforts, even though enjoyed in the utmost variety, and in the highest degree, are, in comparison of Divine consolation, and that, in the lowest degree, but as the glimmering taper, before the meridian sun. Holy consolation is a commodity of heaven, that distant country, not to be imported, but by faith and prayer. • It makes a man inexpressibly more happy, than any earthly comforts can do. One smile of the Redeemer, one glance of heaven, as the sure por-

<sup>u</sup> Matth. xxv. 21.

tion of the holy soul, yields more content and comfort, than all the delights of this world. What are any, what are all, earthly joys, compared with the joy of him, who rejoiceth in the Lord! Indeed, as Luther says, to comfort the heart, is more than to create a world. How inexpressibly powerful and grateful, is heavenly consolation, to the distressed soul! When David had been under great trouble, when a flood of bitter waters, had overflowed his soul; the Lord let fall a drop or two of heavenly comfort, and all was turned unto sweetness. O the inconceivable excellence, the unparalleled sweetness, of Divine consolation!

3. The high importance of spiritual comfort, will also appear, if we consider that, it is the pure delight which saints have, *in common with holy angels*. The pleasures of sense, are such as believers have, in common with irrational creatures; the pleasures merely of reason, are such as they attain equally with other men; but the delights of communion with God, are such as they enjoy in common with the angels of light. They are not, indeed, the same in degree, as the joys of angels, but they are the same in kind. They are the pleasures of a soul, and not of bodily sense; the delights of a holy soul, and not of a carnal mind. The pleasures of true religion, do immediately affect the soul, that part of a holy man, by which he is allied to the world of spirits; and therefore they are to be regarded, as the only sublime, the only true, pleasures of a man. When holy souls are comforted, they are entertained as with angels.

▼ Ps. xciv. 19.

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God. Their consolation is not only spiritual, and therefore suitable to a holy and immortal spirit; but, it is substantial and satisfying, heavenly and glorious\*. Their joy is, in its own nature, unspeakably glorious, and is accompanied with glorying in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is truly honourable, and is the earnest of glory, in their souls. When sinners have “come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling;” they so “come to an innumerable company of angels,” as, in some measure, to participate with them, in that sublime, that celestial delight, which they always enjoy, in the presence of God and the Lamb. They then, begin to imitate the holy and blessed angels, in delighting in objects of the greatest worth, and especially, in the *will* and the *glory* of God in Christ.

4. Spiritual consolation is of such consequence to believers, and to the glory of God in their salvation, that *every part* of sacred Scripture, *contributes to promote it, and is intended to do so*. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime,” says the apostle Paul, “were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope;” as if he had said, ‘Whatever things were, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, written in the Old Testament, were left on record, not only for the instruction of our ancestors, but for ours likewise; in order that we, by means of them, might be excited and encouraged to exercise patience, under all our afflictions, and might be partakers of the joy of faith, and comfort of the

\* 1 Pet. i. 8.

† Rom. xv. 4.

Holy Spirit, so as to attain the sure hope of grace to bear them, and of glory to crown them.' All the types and prophecies, histories and examples, laws and doctrines, recorded in the Scriptures, were designed to increase the consolation of believers, under their various troubles. Accordingly, they all, in the hand of the adorable Spirit, serve, either directly or indirectly, to advance their comfort. For this end, were the Old and New Testaments written, that they might, like breasts of consolation, be sucked by the children of God<sup>a</sup>. The blessed word is, in all its parts, a magazine of comfort to the saints. Even those parts of it, which seem least adapted to afford them comfort, do, notwithstanding, promote their consolation and their delight. The strictest of its commands, prescribe to them delightful work<sup>b</sup>. The severest of its threatenings, deter them from wandering out of such ways, as are ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. The law as a covenant, is subservient to the gospel, and both serve, to bring the believing soul to holy comfort<sup>c</sup>. One commendation of the statutes of God, is, that "they rejoice the heart<sup>d</sup>." The holy word of God is, in all its parts, inexpressibly sweet to the exercised Christian: it is "the joy and rejoicing of his heart<sup>e</sup>." The most delicious honey, is not so grateful to the palate, as the holy Scriptures are, to the spiritual taste<sup>f</sup>. How unspeakably important and useful, then, must spiritual consolation be; when it is the great design

<sup>a</sup> Isa. lxvi. 11.<sup>b</sup> Ps. cxix. 140. Rom. vii. 12.<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 3.<sup>d</sup> Ps. xix. 8. <sup>e</sup> Jer. xv. 16.<sup>f</sup> Ps. xix. 10.

## 54. THE IMPORTANCE AND USEFULNESS

of every part of sacred Scripture, to advance it in the souls of believers !

5. So important is this comfort, that all the dispensations of *Divine grace and providence*, are continually concurring, to increase it in the saints. “ We know,” says an apostle, “ that all things work together for good, to them who love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”<sup>f</sup> By the “ good” which is here mentioned, is meant, the *spiritual and eternal happiness*, or welfare of the saints. But the spiritual and eternal happiness of the saints, consists in spiritual joy, as well as, in spiritual knowledge and true holiness. All things, then, all dispensations and occurrences of providence, however diversified, however afflictive; do, even now, under the special influence of the overruling wisdom and grace of God, co-operate, in all their diversified connections and consequences, one with another, to promote the spiritual joy, the holy consolation, of them who sincerely love him. All hands, in heaven, and earth, and hell, are presently and continually at work; in order to increase, either directly or indirectly, the comfort of them who delight in the Lord: and, if all things, do continually work together for their consolation, nothing remains, to work against it<sup>g</sup>. How important, then,

<sup>f</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

<sup>g</sup> The Jews tell us (Sanhedrim Fol. 108. 2.) that, one Nahum a Jew, was usually called *Gamzu*; because, of every event that happened to him, he used to say, *גַּם זוֹ לטוֹבָה* *Gam zu letobah*, ‘ This also is for good:’ and they give instances of several afflictions, that befel him, which, after he had often used those words, proved, in the issue, to his advantage. How much more reason, has the true Christian, to say of every thing, however afflictive, which befalls him, ‘ This

how useful, to subserve the purposes of the Divine glory in their salvation, must the consolation of believers be, when all things in the universe, are continually employed in advancing it! when all persons, all dispensations, all events, are incessantly concurring to promote it! Prosperity and adversity, whether in things internal or external, work *together*, and under gracious and providential influence, form a curious checker-work, which afterwards will, in the light of glory, be contemplated with unceasing admiration. If the Lord brings his people to his holy *mountain*, it is that he may make them joyful in his house of prayer<sup>h</sup>: if he brings them into the *wilderness*, it is with a view to speak comfortably to them<sup>i</sup>: if their sufferings, at any time, abound, it is in order that, their consolation may also abound<sup>k</sup>. The sufferings of others, are conducive to the increase of their consolation; and the comforts of others, are also for their consolation and salvation<sup>l</sup>. The Lord, by afflictions, empties, humbles, and melts them, that they may be vessels, fitted to receive a larger measure of grace and comfort<sup>m</sup>. Their loss of other comforts, commonly issues in their being favoured with more of spiritual comfort; and therefore it is profitable for them. The Lord Jesus woundeth, in order to heal them; he casteth down, when he designs to raise them up; and he brings death, as it were, upon their feelings, wishes, and prospects, when he is

also is, for my good! What honour, would it reflect on his great Redeemer; and what consolation, would it afford to his own soul!

<sup>h</sup> Isa. lvi. 7.

<sup>i</sup> Hos. ii. 14.

<sup>k</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5.

<sup>l</sup> 2 Cor. i. 6.

<sup>m</sup> Ps. cxix. 71.

about to grant them, the desire of their souls. When he had told his disciples, that he was soon to depart from them, and so to remove from them the greatest earthly comfort that ever they enjoyed, which was his bodily presence; sorrow filled their hearts: but he assured them, that this loss would be expedient, *or*, as the original word also signifies, *profitable* for them; in as much, as it would make way for a still greater mercy, the coming of the *Comforter*, to abide with them for ever <sup>a</sup>. Believers then may assure themselves, that the all-compassionate Saviour will, at no time, and on no account, take away any of their comforts from them, but with a view to give them better comforts. He will usually be sweetest to them, when their lot, in the world, is bitterest; for the sharper their trials are, the more will they serve, to prepare them for his sweetest consolations. If even thick clouds intercept, for a season, the cheering light of his countenance from them; those very clouds, will occasion this light to break forth again upon them, with the brighter splendor. Whether their troubles be external, or internal, they, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, serve to shew them, how much they need to trust constantly and solely in the Lord Jesus, for sanctifying and supporting grace; and the more they trust in Him, the more comfort, as well as holiness, do they receive from his fulness.

6. Spiritual comfort, is of much consequence to believers; for it serves, in a very high degree, to *heighten, and sweeten, all their temporal comforts*. It renders every outward blessing, a real, a sub-

<sup>a</sup> John xvi. 6, 7.

stantial comfort to them. Spiritual consolation, is that, which makes them capable of relishing, and enjoying, their external comforts°. Were a man to possess every thing under the sun, that is delightful and splendid; every thing, that could please his eye, or gratify his taste; if he did not enjoy the favour of God with it, he should still be poor and wretched. To think that, the almighty Jehovah is an infinite enemy to him; that, his temporal comforts may be followed by endless torments; and that, by all that he eateth and drinketh, he may be but fattening for the day of slaughter; this will be as wormwood and gall, mingled with all his delights. What can it avail him, though all the world smile upon him, if he be under the infinite, the tremendous, frowns of almighty God? They cannot, for a moment, skreen him from the impending storm, nor secure him from the consuming fire. Trouble of conscience, renders every comfort of life, insipid and unpleasing; while, on the contrary, peace of conscience, makes even the meanest morsel sweet<sup>p</sup>. It infuseth an additional sweetness into every other comfort. When a man is enabled cordially to trust that, the Lord Jesus loveth and saveth him, and that, he will perfect that which concerneth him; his joy and peace in believing, cannot fail, to impart a heavenly sweetness to all his earthly joys. By trusting in the blessed Redeemer, he tastes that he is good to him; and so he enjoys Him, in all his inferior enjoyments. He, who places all his confidence, and all his delight, in the Lord, will have a double relish for

° Eccles. ix. 7.

<sup>p</sup> Prov. xv. 15, 16.



every earthly comfort ; because he will see the hand of his gracious Redeemer, providing and bestowing it. He will possess Christ in every thing, while he has it ; and every thing in Christ, after it is taken from him <sup>a</sup>. As it is the absence of his blessed Redeemer, that imbitters all his temporal blessings, to the believer ; so it is his presence, cheering his heart, that improves and sweetens them all. Thus we see, that spiritual consolation is of high importance ; because, while it is in itself, the greatest of all comforts, it is that which serves to heighten all other delights.

7. This comfort is of unspeakable importance to the saints, for it not only heightens all their other comforts, but it *alleviates all their calamities*. It makes their heaviest afflictions light <sup>r</sup>. When the spirit of the believer, is without comfort, the smallest trial becomes a burthen ; but when his heart is glad, the greatest, appears light and easy <sup>s</sup>. The weight of an affliction is to be estimated, rather by the impression which it makes upon the spirit, than by any thing in its outward appearance. The smallest will be so heavy, as to overwhelm a holy man, if he be left to struggle with it, in his own strength, and without the presence of Christ to comfort him ; but, if Christ is graciously pleased to pour consolation into his soul, it will be so exhilarated and strengthened, as to induce him to count even the greatest, light, and the longest, but for a moment. A sweet and lively impression of the love of Christ, in redeeming him, accompanied with a true sense of the sin and misery, from which

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 10.<sup>r</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 17.<sup>s</sup> Acts. xvi. 25.  
Rom. v. 2, 3.

he is redeemed, will render him not only submissive, but even joyful in his affliction. And whilst he is rejoicing in hope, though the flesh may still have its uneasy feelings, the spirit shall triumph over them: though a sense of pain may not be taken away, it shall be overcome, by the faith and sense of redeeming love. Paul and Silas, in the prison at Philippi, felt more pleasure than pain, more joy than sorrow. It was the sweetness of Divine consolation, that caused one of the martyrs, when the flame first reached his ear, to say, ‘What a small pain is this, compared with the glory to come!’ What is a drop of vinegar, when put into an ocean of wine! It was this that, as another of them said, made their prisons, their delectable orchards. Favoured with heavenly consolation, many of the saints in ancient times, did not only take patiently, but *joyfully* the spoiling of their goods<sup>c</sup>. When the Lord Jesus, speaketh peace to the holy soul, he so refreshes and consoles it, that no afflictions, however painful, have any *real* bitterness in them. One drop of that consolation, which He dispenseth from heaven, shall suffice, to sweeten a whole sea of external trouble, and to fill the believing soul with inexpressible joy<sup>d</sup>. He hath graciously promised to be, in a special manner, present with his people in their afflictions; and to administer such comfort to their souls, as will greatly alleviate them. “When thou passest through the waters,” saith He, “I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not

<sup>c</sup> Heb. x. 34.<sup>d</sup> Ps. xciv. 19.

be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee <sup>w</sup>." And again, "In me, ye shall have peace, while, in the world, ye shall have tribulation <sup>x</sup>." When he comforts them with a lively sense of his love to them, it turns their wormwood into sweetness, their sorrow into joy. So comforted, they can rejoice, and even glory, in tribulation <sup>y</sup>. This is a plain evidence of the high importance, and excellence, of spiritual consolation, that it overcomes the pains of sense, takes out their sting, and takes off their terror. Holy comfort makes believers to delight so in all the will of God, as to take pleasure even in the hardest things, considered as *his* doing <sup>z</sup>. How sweet, then, must that be, which can sweeten even the wormwood and the gall! Of what consequence must that be, which can make the heaviest burthen light! The delights of sense forsake us, when we are in trouble, and have the greatest need of them <sup>a</sup>; but it is *then*, that the comforts of the Spirit, have the sweetest relish, and the strongest influence <sup>b</sup>. They are like the tree, "cast into the waters of Marah, which made them sweet <sup>c</sup>." How much then are they to be pitied, who are drinking deep of the bitter waters of affliction, and have nothing of Divine consolation to sweeten them!

8. It is spiritual consolation only, which *can effectually remove* that greatest of all afflictions, *trouble of spirit*. The delights of sense, to one who is deeply wounded and dejected in spirit, are

<sup>w</sup> Isa. xliii. 2.

<sup>x</sup> John xvi. 33.

<sup>y</sup> Rom. v. 3.

<sup>z</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 10.

<sup>a</sup> Job xxxiii. 19, 20.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. cxix. 50.

<sup>c</sup> Exod. xv. 25.

“like the singing of songs to a heavy heart<sup>d</sup> :” they, instead of yielding the smallest relief, become quite insipid, and even nauseous: for, notwithstanding the possession of them, and that, even in the highest degree, “a wounded spirit, who can bear?” But spiritual consolation, especially when it is strong, not only alleviates, but effectually removes, that most intolerable of all afflictions. When, after a dark night of desertion, the Lord graciously returneth to the disconsolate believer, and lifteth up the light of his countenance upon him; He thereby puts gladness in his heart, far surpassing that of worldly men, when their corn and their wine increase<sup>e</sup>. By so doing, he putteth off the sackcloth of the exercised Christian, and girdeth him with gladness<sup>f</sup>. No sooner doth Christ comfort them who mourn in Zion, than “he giveth unto them, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness<sup>g</sup>.” If they “have gone forth and wept, bearing precious seed;” yet no sooner doth He impart consolation to them, than “they come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them<sup>h</sup>.” “In his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy, or shouting, cometh in the morning<sup>i</sup>.” How valuable, then, how unspeakably important, must Divine consolation be, to exercised Christians; when they consider that, it is the only, the sovereign cure, for dejection and anguish of spirit!

#### 9. The great importance of spiritual comfort,

<sup>d</sup> Prov. xxv. 20.

<sup>e</sup> Ps. iv. 6, 7.

<sup>f</sup> Ps. xxx. 11.

<sup>g</sup> Isa. lxi. 2, 3.

<sup>h</sup> Ps. cxxvi. 6.

<sup>i</sup> Ps. xxx. 5.

also appears in this, that it serves to *overbalance* every thing in true religion, which seems *difficult and unpleasing*. Not regarding here, either the misrepresentations of some men, or the misapprehensions of others, concerning the way of holiness; I shall only advert to the *chief* difficulties and grievances, which the Scripture itself represents, as occurring in that way. The Lord Jesus, that faithful and true witness, informs us, that the way to heaven, “is a narrow way <sup>k</sup> ;” or, as the words might be rendered, a *strait*, or a *distressful* way; a way in which, the saints have to pass through much tribulation, into the kingdom of God <sup>l</sup>. Beside the multitude of imaginary difficulties, which appears to the slothful man, when he says, “There is a lion in the way, a lion is in the streets <sup>m</sup> ;” there are some *real* difficulties, in the way to the heavenly felicity. Believers, as well as other men, are commanded to exercise *repentance* daily, and so to weep, and mourn, and loath themselves, for their iniquities; to crucify the flesh, and so to mortify the members of the body of sin in them, which is as painful, as the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye; to deny themselves, to renounce the world as a portion, and so to abandon for ever, all the pleasures of sin; to take up their cross, and to lay their account with manifold afflictions; and, at the same time, to fight the good fight of faith, to wrestle against the principalities and powers of darkness, to endure hardness, to run with patience the race that is set be-

<sup>k</sup> Matth. vii. 14.

<sup>l</sup> Acts xiv. 22.

<sup>m</sup> Prov. xxvi. 13.

fore them, and to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Now, though these, and others which might be mentioned, are in themselves real difficulties, which seem very unpleasant, and from which, even eminent believers are often ready to shrink; yet, holy comfort is more, much more, than sufficient to overbalance them. It serves, in the hand of the blessed Spirit, to render wisdom's ways, notwithstanding all the difficulties and grievances which occur in them, "ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace," to the saints. Nay, so sweet, and so powerful, is spiritual consolation; that, in proportion to the degree in which it is bestowed, it makes even those painful exercises themselves, pleasant, those difficult duties, easy<sup>a</sup>. It renders it very pleasant to the Christian, to be without the pleasures of sin. It adds much more, to the pleasantness of a holy life, than it is possible for any sufferings or grievances in this world, ever to take from it. The sufferings are but human; the comfort is Divine. Believers know by experience, that, in proportion as they trust in Christ, the times of their greatest affliction, are usually the seasons of their strongest consolation<sup>o</sup>: and, therefore, even the most dejected and sorrowful of them, would not, for a thousand worlds, change conditions, or pleasures, with the most prosperous of those who are the servants of sin.

10. Holy consolation *removes*, in proportion to the degree of it, *the terror of death and judgment*. Spiritual consolation is that which, in the hand of the blessed Spirit, takes off the terrors and alle-

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xi. 30.

<sup>o</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5.

viates the pains of death. Though death is the friend of grace, it is still the enemy of nature. A dislike and fear of death, therefore, do nowise prove that one is not a true believer. We are not in general fond of handling a serpent, even though we know, that its sting is plucked out. But when the faith of a Christian is strong, and his hope of salvation lively; the joy of his faith, and the rejoicing of his hope, take away in his view, the frightful appearance of death, and bestow upon it, an amiable, an inviting aspect. Living comforts, in his dying moments, make him even "desire, to depart and to be with Christ," the blessed fountain of everlasting consolation<sup>p</sup>. It is the joyful hope of a blessed resurrection, that makes the saints think without fear, of resigning their bodies to the gloomy grave. It is the cheering prospect of "an house not made with hands," that makes them willing without dismay, to leave their earthly tabernacle. When the Lord Jesus would comfort his disciples, in the prospect of his departure from them, he said, "I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again*, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also<sup>q</sup>." If death were to come *alone*, to the saints, its ghastly countenance could not but be terrible to them; but when they believe, and rejoice in the assurance, that their living Redeemer will, according to his faithful promise, come along with it, to sweeten it to them, and to conduct them safely, through the dark valley of the shadow of it<sup>r</sup>, to the heavenly mountain of their Father's house; the prospect is

<sup>p</sup> Phil. i. 23.<sup>q</sup> John xiv. 2, 3.<sup>r</sup> Ps. xxiii. 4.

no longer dreadful, but delightful. How consoling are these words of the great Redeemer ! He doth not say, that *comfort* merely will come, in that time of need ; but, that *He himself*, the glorious fountain of consolation, will then come, and receive them to himself. It is the comfort of such a promise, when believed with application, that relieves them against the dread of endless torment, and so, raises them above the slavish fear of dying. When the apostle Paul says, that Jesus died, he speaking, at the same time, of believers, says, that they only *sleep*, and sleep in Him \*. One reason why he varies the term, is this : Jesus endured death in all its terrors ; in order that, it might become a quiet and sweet *sleep*, to them who believe in him. “ It is *Christ* that died †.” The suffering of death, was bitter to Christ, that the sleep of death, might be sweet to them. When they, then, are enabled to rejoice in the well-grounded hope, that death to them, will only be a dissolution, a departure, a falling asleep in the arms of their dear Redeemer ; the dread of it is thereby removed. People in general, are not afraid to lie down in bed to sleep. Ah ! how contemptible is that pleasure, which is damped at the view of death, and chased away at the prospect of judgment ! But how important, how excellent, that joy, which, instead of being itself abated, lessens, and even removes, the terror of that last enemy !

11. The high importance and excellence of it, will further appear, if it be *compared with the delights of sense*. Earthly and sensual joy is easily

\* 1 Thess. iv. 14,

† Rom. viii. 34.



told, and utterly void of glory ; but the joy which is in believing, is " unspeakable, and full of glory ".\* The greatest of worldly joys, are mean and empty, and their highest amount may easily be expressed. Much more, indeed, is frequently thought and said of their value, than it deserves. They are never, from experience, found equal to the notion, which worldly men have of them, nor to the expectation, which they form from them. But spiritual joy, is far above the highest conceptions, that either men or angels can form of it, and the loftiest descriptions, that they can give of it. Earthly joys too, are empty and inglorious: even the most plausible of them, can never fill or satisfy the soul: they are far below the excellence, as well as the high capacity, of the immortal soul. But the joy of faith, the comfort of communion with Christ, as it is substantial and satisfying, so it is excellent and honourable: it is that, of which none needs to be ashamed, and is heavenly glory itself, begun in the soul. Spiritual joy, is pure and sublime ; sensual and sinful pleasure, is sordid and mean : the one, is ennobling to the soul ; the other is debasing : the former, is elevating and enlarging ; the latter, is degrading and enslaving ; that is satisfying ; this is surfeiting: the one, increases and improves with the using ; the other, fades with use, and leaves, to them who place their happiness in it, a piercing sting behind it: the former, is pleasing to the Lord ; the latter, is offensive to him : that, will issue in perfect and everlasting joy ; this, will end in direful and eternal anguish. As it was those of the Israelites in the desert, who could not form

\* 1 Pet. i. 8.

a right estimate of the milk and honey of Canaan, that doted upon the onions and garlick of Egypt; so it is the *carnal* mind, which knows not and loves not spiritual delights, that relishes and prefers before them, the sordid pleasures of sense. In proportion as a man has experience of the sweetness of spiritual pleasures, those that are sensual and ensnaring, become insipid to him: they have now no sweetness, in comparison of the sweetness which excellet. Indeed it is impossible to express, how low, how contemptible, the joys of sense, and especially of sin, appear, to them who are rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

12. Finally, The inexpressible importance of spiritual comfort, appears chiefly in this, that *it promoteth, in an eminent degree, universal holiness of heart and life.*

It revives and invigorates *the* graces of the Christian: It excites and encourages a holy man, to trust cordially and constantly in Christ, for sanctification; to love Him, and God in him, with ardent affection; and so to love his manifested glory, as to perform every duty, in faith, from love, and for the glory of his holy name. He cannot love God supremely, nor delight in doing his will; unless he himself be delighted and cheered, by trusting that God loveth him <sup>w</sup>. No arguments will persuade a man, to commit his way to the Lord, or to cast his care upon him; if he do not believe, that the Lord careth for him. It is a sense of redeeming love, warm on the heart, that captivates the soul, conciliates the will, and engages the affections <sup>x</sup>.

<sup>w</sup> 1 John iv. 19.

<sup>x</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

A comfortable persuasion of the love of Jesus to the soul, will be operative in it, as a torch in a sheaf: it will gradually destroy its remaining enmity against him. It will enlarge the heart with ardent love to him, and elevate the affections above the world. The soul, in order to be kept from lusting after earthly and carnal pleasures, must, by an appropriating faith, take pleasure in the Saviour, and in his love. Holy comfort imbitters sin to a man, and disposes him, with deep abhorrence of it, to strive against it. It tends greatly to melt, and to humble the heart for sin <sup>y</sup>. The firmer a holy man's comfort is, the softer his heart is. The more "his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord, so as not to be afraid of evil tidings;" the more disposed he is, to fear the evil of *sinning* against him <sup>z</sup>.

Spiritual comfort also, inclines and encourages the saints, ardently to follow after universal holiness *of life*, and constantly to long for the perfection of it. "The Spirit of the Lord God," saith Messiah, "is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me,...to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called *Trees of righteousness*, The planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified <sup>a</sup>." It disposes believers, to frequency and impartiality in self-examination <sup>b</sup>; and excites them, to diligent endeavours after increasing

<sup>y</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10.    <sup>z</sup> Acts ix. 31.    <sup>a</sup> Isa. lxi. 1—3.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. xxvi. 1—3.

communion with God, in every duty <sup>c</sup>. It is employed by the Holy Spirit, to render them active, resolute, and cheerful, in the spiritual performance of all their various duties <sup>d</sup>. Godly sorrow, indeed, disposes them to be serious; but it is holy joy, that renders them *active*: it is “the oil of gladness,” that makes the wheels of their voluntary obedience, move forward with ease and speed. Some measure of holy comfort, is necessary to the practice of evangelical holiness. Summer, in the natural world, is necessary as well as winter. The very nature of the duties and exercises of the true Christian, is such, that they require comfort of heart, for the acceptable performance of them. A holy life commonly begins with comfort, and is maintained by it <sup>e</sup>. The way to be kept from carelessness and formality, in spiritual exercises, is, so to trust in Christ for salvation, as to cease to despond; for the soul grows *careless* by desponding. The sorrow of the world, and the fear of hell, enervate and benumb all the faculties of the soul. A man can perform no *spiritual* obedience, without some degree of spiritual joy, as well as of true love. The former, is as much the fruit of the Spirit, as the latter <sup>f</sup>. The Christian cannot be encouraged to pray to God; except he be consoled with the hope, that God, for Christ’s sake, will graciously hear and answer his prayer <sup>g</sup>. He cannot cordially praise God; unless he be enabled to trust, that God will glorify the perfections of his nature, and

<sup>c</sup> Ps. lxiii. 1—8.<sup>d</sup> Ps. cxix. 32, 166.<sup>e</sup> Ps. xxvi. 3.    2 Thess. ii. 17.<sup>f</sup> Gal. v. 22.<sup>g</sup> Ps. lxxxvi. 7.

magnify the promises of his covenant, in his eternal salvation. It is in proportion as his heart is comforted, that he will be truly thankful to the Lord, for the smallest favour. It is holy consolation, that makes every act of grace, every instance of duty, every part of spiritual service, how secret soever it be, pleasant to a good man. In a word, it is this, that so exhilarates, and so constrains him, as to make all his affection run out *to* the Lord Jesus, and all his strength run out *for* him.

So much, for the importance and usefulness of spiritual comfort, to every believer.

From what has been here advanced, we may infer, That no comforts are *so excellent, so sweet, and so desirable, as spiritual comforts*. While these form a part of eternal life, and promote, in an eminent degree, the love and practice of holiness; they are the same in kind, as the delights of holy angels, and of ransomed spirits in the holy place on high. They are the pleasures of a holy soul, and they heighten the relish of every outward comfort. The light of God's gracious countenance, shining upon the soul, is better than life, and all its most valued enjoyments. If an Israelite was to be cut off from his people, who had in his house, a perfume like that of the Tabernacle<sup>b</sup>; surely, the Lord will not hold him guiltless, who persuades himself, that any other perfume can be so fragrant, so delightful, as that of the house of God; that any other joy can be so excellent, so ennobling, so cheering, as the joy of God's salvation.

<sup>b</sup> Exod. xxx. 33.

Is spiritual joy, of such high importance to the holiness and happiness of the saints, in this world, where it is far from being perfect? How *highly then will it contribute to their felicity, in the heavenly world*, where it shall, through all eternity, be full and overflowing! O how transcendently great, how inexpressibly glorious, will the holiness and blessedness of the redeemed, in the immediate presence of God and of the Lamb, be; where they shall attain "fulness of joy," and perhaps, *an eternal increase* of rapturous delight! If spiritual consolation, even when it is small, impels believers to unwearied efforts, in holy worship and spiritual obedience; we need not wonder, that the four living creatures, round about the throne, are represented, in the visions of John, as not resting day and night, as never ceasing to thank and praise the Lord; "saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!" If even a small measure of pure consolation, is of such advantage to a holy man, now, as to encourage his heart, to invigorate his grace, to excite his holy activity, and to heighten all his outward comforts; of what unspeakable gain to him, hereafter, shall the fulness of joy, the perfection of endless delight be!

Is holy consolation, of such inestimable value to the spiritual seed of Christ, that He, in the immensity of his love, came down from the realms of light, to purchase it for them? Believers may learn from this, what *infinite obligations* they are under, to their incarnate Redeemer. Christian, thy dear

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iv. 8.

Saviour hath, at the infinite expense of his own unparalleled obedience, anguish, and death, purchased and secured everlasting consolation for thee. He was troubled in spirit, that thou mightst be comforted: He was encompassed with the sorrows of eternal death, that thou mightst enter into the joys of everlasting life: He was arrayed in the spirit of heaviness, that thou mightst be clothed with "the garment of praise:" He, who was, from eternity, the delight of his Father, "rejoicing always before Him," endured for thee, the hiding of his countenance, and the sense of his infinite wrath, that thou mightst, to eternity, joy in God through him. Hath he not done and suffered enough, to shew thee, that he is willing to enrich thee with consolation, that he careth for thy comfort, and that he giveth thee sufficient cause to be always of good comfort? Were it not, that there is something in thy heart, which requires the discipline of his covenant; he taketh such pleasure in comforting thee, that thou couldst, at no time, be disconsolate. Thou art therefore infinitely bound, to love Him ardently and supremely, to glory in his cross, and to delight in doing his will.

From what has been said, we may also learn that, In proportion as a man makes Christ and holiness *his choice*, he will find them to be *his delight*. The more communion with Jesus Christ, and the more conformity to Him, he desires and attains; the more delight in him, and in God through him, shall he experience. The more his heart is set upon growing in holiness, and the more willingly and resolutely, he performs all his duties,

for the glory of his God and Redeemer ; the more shall he know by experience, that the comforts of religion overbalance the difficulties of it. In proportion as he takes pleasure in spiritual exercises, and holy performances, and that from love to Christ, and for the glory of God ; the most laborious exercises of religion shall become pleasant to him, and the most difficult duties, easy. Holy consolation, in the hand of the blessed Spirit, makes *every thing in holiness*, a pleasure to him ; and the closer he walketh with God, the God of all comfort, the stronger and sweeter is his consolation.

If spiritual comfort is of such importance and utility to believers, as hath been shewn ; surely, it is the duty of every believer, *to use diligently*, the appointed means of attaining a gradual *increase* of it. The apostle Paul exhorted the believers in Corinth, to “ be of good comfort <sup>k</sup> ;” that is, to be so diligent in receiving, by the frequent exercise of faith, the comfort offered and promised to them in the gospel, as to attain more and more of the joy of faith, and of a good conscience. Nothing will carry a Christian through the inward and outward difficulties of religion, but the inward supports and delights of it. Every believer, therefore, should constantly endeavour to attain, as early as possible, *much* of the comfort of the Holy Spirit ; that he may, the more easily and cheerfully, surmount every difficulty, and be the more resolute in the practice of universal holiness. The hypocrite will not “ always call upon God,” because he will not “ *delight* himself in the Almighty<sup>l</sup>.” Were

<sup>k</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

<sup>l</sup> Job xxvii. 10.



he to delight himself in the Almighty, especially as a God infinitely *holy*; he would no longer be a hypocrite, and would always call upon Him. If the true believer would, at all times, persevere in spiritual, and cheerful obedience to the commandments of Christ; he must, in the strength of promised grace, labour to attain more and more of the comfort of communion with Him in his righteousness and fulness: for, the more his heart is comforted, the more “he is established in every good word and work<sup>m</sup>.” He hath always need of spiritual comfort, in this valley of tears, to strengthen him for his spiritual conflicts, and holy performances; and therefore, under an abiding sense of his need of it, he should daily employ the means of receiving fresh supplies.

Once more: Is holy consolation, of such consequence to the saints? Hence it is evident, that their loss of it, must be a *very great and grievous loss to them*. The loss, indeed, of lively and pleasant feelings, though a grievous, yet is not usually a very great loss to the exercised Christian; but the loss of that *ordinary* comfort or tranquillity of mind which he has hitherto enjoyed, is both a very great, and a very grievous loss to him. He may, for a season, be without sensible and lively impressions, and yet not be deserted of God, in respect of habitual comfort, or serenity of mind. For, as it is not a cloud intervening, nor even a partial eclipse of the sun, but the absence of the sun, that occasions night; so, it is not the want of a lively impression, or a pleasant frame; but the loss of

<sup>m</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 17.

that peaceful tranquillity of spirit, which the believer was wont to enjoy, that causeth darkness to cover his soul. The loss of this, is an unspeakably great and grievous loss to him. If Christ the Sun of righteousness, is graciously pleased to shine upon him, all is well; but, if He hideth his countenance, the smiles of the whole creation can afford him no solid comfort. Believer, take heed that thou do not provoke the Lord, to withhold influences of holy comfort from thy soul. Do not, by carnal security, or self-confidence, or earthly mindedness, or any other iniquity, provoke Him to turn the reviving smiles of his countenance, which thou now enjoyest, into killing frowns. Thy soul is no more self-sufficient, than self-existent. If the Lord cease to refresh it with his cheering smiles, it cannot but languish and faint.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### OF THE WAY IN WHICH, BELIEVERS LOSE THEIR SPIRITUAL COMFORT.

**A**LTHOUGH a holy man cannot, so much as for a moment, lose that *principle* of comfort or joy, which the Holy Spirit, in regeneration, hath implanted in his heart, nor yet that *entire habit* of joy, which He hath, in sanctification, implanted there; yet he sometimes loses the *sense or feeling* of it: he is at times deprived of sensible comfort, or of the joy of God's salvation. By his losing of spiritual consolation, I do not mean, his falling merely for an hour or a day, from a pleasant, into an unpleasant frame of

spirit ; (for his frames are almost perpetually changing ;) but, his being more or less deprived of the sense of God's peculiar favour to him, or of the sensible possession of spiritual comfort, and that for a considerable time. When the God of all comfort continueth, for a season, to withhold the cheering light of his gracious countenance from his soul ; it cannot but be disquieted and disconsolate <sup>n</sup>.

Though the Lord, on purpose to display his wisdom and sovereignty, to try the graces of believers, to mortify their pride, and to teach them the necessity of adventuring, as sinners, to trust simply in Christ, for all the grace of the promise, withholds for a time, sensible comfort from them; yet, for the most part, he doth it in order to *chasten* them, for their sins against him as their God and Father <sup>o</sup>. At the same time, it is not for every sin of infirmity, that he suspends consoling influences from their souls; otherwise, as they can never so much as think a thought, without polluting it by some degree of sin, he would, at all times, be afflicting them with want of comfort ; but, it is for some peculiarly aggravated transgressions, or, for relapsing often into the same sin. It is their iniquities and backslidings, that procure trouble of mind for them <sup>p</sup>. Such are God's love to them, and care of them, and such is his abhorrence of their sin ; that he cannot but make even his dear children themselves feel, that he is displeased with them, when they backslide from him <sup>q</sup>. His faithfulness also to his

<sup>n</sup> Ps. xxx. 7.

<sup>o</sup> Isa. lix. 2.

<sup>p</sup> Jer. ii. 19.

<sup>q</sup> Heb. xii. 6. Amos iii. 2.

word, in which he threatens trouble as a fatherly chastisement, and even promises it as a blessing in disguise, to them, moves him to do so<sup>r</sup>. And though the sins of some particular believers, as in the case of Job, may not in every instance, be the procuring cause of their loss of comfort; yet they are at least the occasion of it<sup>s</sup>.

All that, in this Chapter, I further propose to do, is, to point out some of the leading sins and ways of sinning, by which, believers provoke their heavenly Father to suspend for a time, that degree of holy consolation from them, which they have formerly enjoyed.

1. In the first place, They provoke him to do this, by allowing themselves to continue, in a culpable degree, *ignorant of his covenant of grace, and of their warrant to come, as sinners*, and to trust in the Lord Jesus, for their own particular salvation. These are objects in which, the comfort of true believers, is at all times, intimately concerned; the spiritual and distinct knowledge of which, is necessary to qualify them, for deriving continual supplies of grace and consolation, from the fulness of Christ<sup>t</sup>.

If believers then suffer themselves, surrounded as they are, by the clear light of the blessed gospel, to retain ignorance, or to cherish mistakes, respecting the covenant of Jehovah's *peace*<sup>u</sup>, and the infinite fulness and freeness of his *grace* treasured up in Christ, the glorious Trustee of that covenant; they do thereby undervalue the only doctrine, on

<sup>r</sup> Ps. cxix. 75.

<sup>s</sup> Jer. xxxi. 18.

<sup>t</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. John xvii. 3. and vi. 40. Rom. xv. 13.

<sup>u</sup> Isa. liv. 10.

which all true comfort depends, and so, provoke their heavenly Father, to suspend the consolations of his holy covenant, from their souls. The gospel is an exhibition of God's covenant of grace, to lost sinners of mankind; and therefore it is "good tidings of great *joy* to all people <sup>w</sup>." To be willingly ignorant, then, of that gracious contract, is the same as to be willingly ignorant of the glorious gospel; and to retain mistaken notions of the former, is the same as to err concerning the latter. When true Christians satisfy themselves with superficial and indistinct views of the covenant of grace, or with knowing little more, than the first principles of the doctrine of that august contract; they so far *despise* the doctrine of redeeming grace, the joyful tidings of a free salvation, and so *lose* the joy of that salvation.

Moreover, in the administration of that everlasting covenant, Christ, with his righteousness, and fulness, is freely and fully offered to sinners, of mankind in common; and sinners, as such, are graciously invited, yea, and are peremptorily commanded, to believe on his name <sup>x</sup>. The authentic offer, call, and command, founded upon the infinite intrinsic value of the righteousness of Christ, and addressed to every sinner who hears the gospel; afford to every one, a full warrant to trust in Christ, for all the salvation promised in the covenant. If Christians then allow themselves to remain, in a great measure, ignorant of their *warrant*, as sinners in themselves, to place direct con-

<sup>w</sup> Luke ii. 10.

<sup>x</sup> John vi. 32. Rev. xxii. 17. 1 John iii. 23.

fidence in Christ for all their salvation, or if they cherish mistakes concerning it; they provoke the Lord, who is jealous for the honour of his covenant, and of his word of grace, to withhold from them, that peace and joy, which are in believing; and, at the same time, they indirectly invite Satan, to tempt them to conclude, that they have no warrant whatever, to trust that Christ will save them. Were believers to attain a more spiritual, and clear, understanding of the eternal covenant, and of the authentic offer of it, than they commonly do; they would see that they have, in the word of grace without them, a full and unchangeable warrant, to trust at all times in the Lord Jesus, for their own particular salvation; and so, they would live a more holy and comfortable life, than they commonly do. They would in that case clearly see, that it is warrantable for them, and therefore lawful and reasonable, to trust, even with full assurance of faith, in their faithful Redeemer. Ah! how sinful, how displeasing to the God of all comfort, is it, to treat with neglect his holy covenant, and the warrant, which he graciously affords sinners of mankind as such, to take hold of it! and how effectually will it mar the comfort of one's own soul!

‘It was a saying of an eminent Minister, on his death-bed, that he had much peace and quietness’ of mind, ‘not so much from a greater measure of grace, than other Christians had, or from any *immediate* witnessing of the Spirit; but, because he had a more clear understanding of the covenant of grace, than many others, having studied it, and preached it, so many years as he had done.’ *BROOKS’ Cabinet*, p. 113.

2. They provoke the Lord to suspend influences of consolation from them, by their yielding often to *disbelief and distrust* of Jesus Christ. An apostle says, "We which have believed do enter into rest <sup>a</sup>." "Thou wilt keep him," saith the prophet Isaiah, "in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee <sup>a</sup>." And again, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established <sup>b</sup>." If a Christian frequently neglect the exercise of trusting in Christ, for fresh supplies of grace and comfort; if, instead of trusting with all his heart, and at all times, in his infinitely faithful Redeemer, for the grace which is in *Him*, and is brought near in the promise, he often trusts to the grace that is in *himself*; his heart, by so doing, departeth from the Lord Jesus <sup>c</sup>, the only Fountain of consolation; and he places that confidence in his own renewed nature, which he is commanded to place in his Divine Redeemer. By so doing, he *idolizes* the new creature: he trusteth in his own heart: he leans to his own understanding: he makes a saviour of his own created grace. Thus he provoketh his heavenly Father, who is a jealous God, to hide his face from him, and to eclipse his evidences of grace from his view. It is now necessary, that the Lord, who "will ever be mindful of his covenant," should perform to him, in a higher degree than formerly, this promise; "From *all your idols*, will I cleanse you <sup>d</sup>." Accordingly God, in order to chasten him for his idolatry, and to teach him the necessity of

<sup>a</sup> Heb. ix. 3.<sup>a</sup> Isa. xxvi. 3.<sup>b</sup> Isa. vii. 9.<sup>c</sup> Jer. xvii. 5.<sup>d</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

living continually by faith, withholds consolation from his soul, and ceases to shine upon his evidences of grace. The consequence is, that the believer now, not only discerns no grace in his heart, to trust to, but begins to doubt if ever he had any. He formerly looked for comfort, to the *principle* of grace, which he discerned in himself, rather than to the *fulness* of grace, which is in Christ; contrary to this high command, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.” But now, that he can see and feel nothing in his heart, but deep and strong corruption, nothing but a body of sin and death, he becomes at once, discouraged and disconsolate. Christian, thou never hast greater need, to trust simply and firmly in thy Divine Saviour, than when thy graces are most lively, and most discernable; for then, self-confidence is most ready, so to prevail against thee, as to provoke a jealous God, to withhold spiritual comfort from thy soul. If thou desirest to retain holy consolation, repose the unsuspecting confidence of thy heart, solely and constantly in thy faithful Redeemer. Apply and trust and plead His promises. If thou distrust Him; if thou yield to suspicious and hard thoughts of him, thou transgressest against him, without a cause. The Lord Jesus hath never dealt so, in his ways of grace and providence, with any soul, as to give it cause to be suspicious of him. Ah! what dishonour, dost thou reflect upon the glorious Immanuel, by refusing to trust solely in him! Be not grieved, that thou hast nothing to trust to, for thy salvation, beside Christ.



and the promise; but rather rejoice, that thou needest nothing besides<sup>f</sup>. Pray often and earnestly, that the Holy Spirit may convince thee more deeply, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and especially, of the greatest of all sins,—unbelief<sup>g</sup>.

3. They lose their holy comfort, by making their graces, or duties, or lively frames, their *warrant or ground of right*, to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. These, indeed, are great *encouragements*, to continue trusting in the Saviour; but, they form no part of a man's warrant, to renew his actings of trust in him. They are fruits and evidences of saving faith; but are no part of the *ground* of it. To make them the ground, or even a *part* of the ground, of our right to confide in Jesus for salvation, would be as preposterous, as it would be, when transplanting a young tree, to set the top-branches of it in the ground, instead of the roots. The faith of a believer, must be grounded on faithfulness in the word, and not on feelings in the heart. If the Christian, then, instead of making the authentic offer, call, and commandment to believe, all addressed in the gospel, to him as a sinner of mankind, his warrant, to renew his exercise of trusting in Christ for all his salvation, thinketh so highly of his experiences or evidences, as to make *them* his ground of right to do so, he is guilty of presumption. He sets aside the warrant which the Holy Spirit in the word affords him, and presumes to trust in Christ, upon the ground of that in himself, which is indeed the fruit, but not the root, the evidence, but not the ground, of faith. Thus, instead of

<sup>f</sup> Ps. lxii. 2, 5, 6.

<sup>g</sup> John xvi. 8, 9.

a true, he places an unwarrantable, confidence in his Redeemer; and hereby, he discovers the pride and self-righteous propensity, that remain in him<sup>b</sup>. Sensible that, his holy qualities and performances, can give him no right to *salvation itself*; his legal spirit prompts him to conclude, that they will afford him at least, a right to the *Saviour*, a right, to exercise particular trust in him for salvation. Hence, when he discerns his evidences of personal interest in Christ, he can freely trust him; but when these are eclipsed and cannot be seen, he counts it unwarrantable and presumptuous, to confide in him. Now, seeing it is pride or a legal spirit, that disposes the Christian to think, that his graces and evidences can give him a right, to apply and confide in Christ; and seeing the immutable design of God is, to exalt the Saviour, and to humble the sinner; he withholds the comfortable sense of his favour, from the believer<sup>i</sup>: he ceases to shine upon his graces and evidences. He not only leaveth him, it may be, to fall repeatedly into some known sin; but he permitteth Satan, and the man's own proud and unbelieving heart, to persuade him, that he hath now no right at all, to trust, that the holy Jesus will save such a sinner as he is. Thus he has procured for himself, the loss of his comfort. But even this loss, how great and grievous soever it may be, is almost less than nothing, in comparison of the infinite dishonour, which he hath reflected upon the Lord Jesus; by presuming to substitute his own graces and attainments, in the room of the authoritative offers and calls of the

<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 7.<sup>i</sup> Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

gospel, as his warrant to trust in him ; and, by not venturing to rely upon him for grace, except he see grace already in himself, to give him a right to place confidence in him. Believer, if thou wouldst retain spiritual consolation, take heed that, thou never build thy faith upon the reports of sense : build it only, upon the sure, the unchangeable, record of God who cannot lie. Do not substitute sense, in the place of his true and holy word. Build thy faith and thy comfort upon Christ in the word, and not upon thy experiences. Do not live upon Christ as *felt* in the heart, but upon Christ as *offered* in the gospel.

4. They procure for themselves, the loss of spiritual comfort, by *discontent and impatience, arising from the inordinate love* of some earthly comfort. When a good man, instead of placing all his happiness, and all his hope, in Christ and in God, as his God and portion ; places much of them, in some external comfort, so as to be disposed often to say, ‘ What would become of me, or, How uncomfortable should I be, were it not for *this* comfort!’ he thereby provokes the Lord, who is always more ready to profit, than to please, his children, to tear the idol from his embrace<sup>k</sup>. If he begins to “make gold his hope, and to say to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence<sup>l</sup> ;” or, if “he trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, so that his heart departeth from the Lord ; he shall,” under the chastening of his heavenly Father, be, for a season, “like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the

<sup>k</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

<sup>l</sup> Job xxxi. 24.

parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited <sup>m</sup>.” “The broken reed on which he leaneth,” will not only fail him, “but will go into his hand and pierce it.” His comforts will be diminished: his hopes will be disappointed: his schemes will one after another be frustrated. His idol, whatever it be, will either be torn from him, or be turned into a source of daily vexation to him. The Lord will break his cisterns, and send a worm to his gourds. “For the iniquity of his *covetousness*,” saith Jehovah, “was I wroth and smote him; I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart <sup>n</sup>.” The inordinate and immoderate love of any temporal benefit, doth, upon the loss of that benefit, commonly produce discontent, impatience, and fretfulness, which have a natural tendency to wear down the spirit. Were the Christian to bear his loss of outward comforts, in the exercise of faith, and of resignation to the holy will of God, he should still continue to experience inward consolation. But when he presumes to fret and murmur, as if the Lord had wronged him, or had been unkind to him; saying, ‘Alas! My afflictions are very uncommon, are peculiarly severe;’ he thereby procures for himself, in addition to his outward losses, the loss of inward consolation. Such a behaviour as this, forms a combination of various sins, all of which, are inconceivably heinous, and exceeding sinful. Discontent, inclines a man to be impatient under afflictions: discontent and impatience, set his mind as on the rack, and torment it with distracting

<sup>m</sup> Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

<sup>n</sup> Isa. lvii. 17.

cares, how to be delivered, or how to have his loss retrieved: the secret root of these, is an inordinate love of the body, and of worldly enjoyments<sup>a</sup>: this again, arises from a want of due resignation to the holy will of God, and of satisfaction with *Him* alone, as an all-sufficient portion for the whole man<sup>b</sup>; and it is usually attended with much disbelief and distrust of his promise. The Lord, in his gracious promise, saith to every believer, "There shall no evil befall thee<sup>c</sup>." 'No;' says the fretful Christian, 'this which has befallen to me, is evil; otherwise I should not have been disquieted by it.' But should it not, on the contrary, even delight the Christian to find that, the Lord is drawing off provision from his worldly lusts? Knowing that he must shortly die, ah! why is he so fond of temporal and transitory enjoyments? Why so anxious to acquire them; so eager to embrace them; so disquieted by the loss of them?

Believer, thy Covenant-God is all-sufficient for thee; and He alloweth thee to call him *thine*. Why then, dost thou go a begging to creatures for supply? Consider that, it is a much greater felicity, to desire nothing earthly but what thou hast, than to have all that thou desirest. Do not any more provoke the Lord, by obstinate or sullen grief for any outward loss, "lest a worse thing come upon thee." Then only, art thou in a right frame, when God in Christ is enough for thee. Know that, it is in the absence or contempt of earthly comforts, that the Holy Spirit is most a Comforter. Remember that, God is never to be blamed, for de-

<sup>a</sup> James iv. 4.<sup>b</sup> Ps. cxlii. 5.<sup>c</sup> Ps. xci. 10.

priving thee of things, which would carry away thy heart from himself, as thy sure and all-sufficient portion. Let not thy life, even for a moment, be bound up in any worldly enjoyment. O "take heed and beware of covetousness"<sup>r</sup>—it is *idolatry*; and "their sorrows shall be multiplied, that hasten after another god".

5. They lose their spiritual comfort, *by entertaining vain thoughts*. By vain thoughts, I mean, empty, frivolous, foolish, unprofitable, groundless, proud, ostentatious, deceitful, impure, and revengeful thoughts; as also, wandering thoughts in prayer, and in other religious exercises<sup>t</sup>. These thoughts and such as these, are vain: they are contrary to the holy law of God, and they exalt themselves against it. "I hate vain thoughts," says the holy Psalmist, "but thy law do I love". Now when a believer, instead of hating and repelling vain thoughts, suffers them to *lodge* within him<sup>u</sup>; when he entertains them, and allows them to continue unresisted in his heart, he thereby provokes the displeasure of his heavenly Father. The mind of the Christian should always be well furnished with proper subjects of thought, and should habitually exercise itself upon them. Thus, under the influ-

<sup>r</sup> "There are two words in the Greek Testament, which are rendered *covetousness* in our version. The one literally signifies, *The love of money*; the other, *A desire of more*. The senses are indeed coincident: for no man would desire more of that which he does not love; and as he that loveth silver, cannot be satisfied with the silver that he already possesses, he will of course desire more." NEWTON'S Works, vol. 6. p. 473.

<sup>s</sup> Ps. xvi. 4.

<sup>t</sup> Ps. cxix. 113.

<sup>u</sup> Eph. vi. 18. James v. 16.

<sup>v</sup> Jer. iv. 14.

ences of the Holy Spirit, it will be secured against the frequent incursion of a multitude of vain thoughts; which otherwise will consume much of his precious time, defile his conscience, and expose him sooner or later, to a multitude of perplexing, solicitous, and sorrowful thoughts<sup>x</sup>. Nothing but the frequent exercise of true faith and repentance, will commonly prevent, in such cases, his sin, from being inscribed in legible characters on his chastisement. His vain thoughts, if entertained, will procure for him, perplexing and uncomfortable thoughts. David experienced much perplexity of conscience, in consequence of his vain thoughts, and prayed earnestly, that the Lord would “cleanse him from secret faults<sup>y</sup>.” The Christian, if he would retain his holy comfort, must “keep his heart with all diligence<sup>z</sup> :” he must watch his thoughts, strictly, and constantly, as well as his words and actions: it will be necessary, that he walk circumspectly in *secret*, as well as in public. If he suffer himself to indulge empty and proud thoughts, he will grieve the Holy Spirit of God<sup>a</sup>, and provoke Him to withhold influences of consolation from his soul. Believer, if thou wouldst keep up the comfort of communion with a holy God, trust in the Lord Jesus, at all times, for sanctifying grace, to enable thee daily, to mortify the members of the body of sin in thy heart. Suffer not thy thoughts to wander in prayer, or in any other act of devotion. When thou art about to pray, consider on the one hand, the greatness and

<sup>x</sup> Ps. xciv. 19.

<sup>y</sup> Ps. xix. 12.

<sup>z</sup> Prov. iv. 23.

<sup>a</sup> Eph. iv. 30.

variety of thy wants ; and, on the other, the omniscience and holiness of Jehovah, to whom thou art to send up thy supplications ; who hath said that, he “ will be sanctified in them that come nigh him.” Guard, especially in secret prayer, against coldness and indifference. If vain thoughts, intruding in acts of Divine worship, be not entertained, but on the contrary, be hated, resisted, and lamented by thee ; they will seldom be permitted to rob thee of thy spiritual comfort. But, if thou love them, or yield to them, or suffer them quietly to lodge within thee ; they will soon occasion such a mist of darkness in thy soul, that thou shalt not be able to discern the graces which dwell there.

6. Believers procure for themselves, the loss of holy comfort, *by mistaking* blasphemous and other evil thoughts injected by Satan, *for sins of their own*. Satan, sometimes, in a way of furious assault, throws in suddenly and swiftly, upon the souls of many of the saints, temptations to blasphemous, atheistical, impure, revengeful, and despairing thoughts. Such horrible injections are, by the apostle Paul, termed “ *the fiery darts* of the wicked one <sup>b</sup> ;” because, like the sharp and envenomed darts of a cruel enemy, flying swiftly and invisibly, they penetrate the soul before it is aware, and hurry it on, to hard and blasphemous thoughts of God and of the Saviour. These violent and sudden temptations, like impoisoned darts, pierce, and inflame the holy soul, with anguish and horror : and they not only fill it with the greatest uneasiness ; but, if they for a moment be yielded to, they produce

<sup>b</sup> Eph. vi. 16.



the most unbecoming suspicions of the grace, and the word of God <sup>c</sup>. Blasphemous and atheistical thoughts do, indeed, arise often from the depravity, that remains in believers themselves; for our Lord saith, "Out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts, ...blasphemies <sup>d</sup>." When exercised Christians do not resist, but on the contrary, yield to, blasphemous and other evil thoughts; they ought, in that case, to consider them as arising out of their own hearts, and to charge themselves with them, as sins of their own. But, if such thoughts strike their minds, violently and suddenly <sup>e</sup>; if their being assaulted with them, vexes and grieves them <sup>f</sup>; and if their souls tremble at them, and, with deep abhorrence, resist them <sup>g</sup>; they ought, then, not to charge them upon themselves, as *their* sins, but upon Satan, as *his*. Now, it is because believers do not, as they ought, distinguish between those blasphemous and evil thoughts, which are injected by the devil, and those, which proceed from their own hearts; that they are often so imposed on by Satan, as to mistake the former, for sins of their own, and so to be deprived of the consolation, which in the gospel is allowed them. There is a great difference, indeed, between a man's being *tempted* to blaspheme, or to doubt the truth of the Divine testimony, and his being *actually guilty* of blasphemy, or of doubting the truth of Scripture. It is only, by his *complying* with temptation, that he becomes guilty. Believer, thou hast much reason to be thankful, if thou hast

<sup>c</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 7, & 9.

<sup>d</sup> Matth. xv. 19.

<sup>e</sup> Matth. xvi. 22, 23.

<sup>f</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 21, 22.

<sup>g</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 15.

not been left, to take pleasure in those suggestions, or to frame arguments in support of them. Satan may be permitted to overpower, for a moment, the apparent exercise of every grace in thee, by a torrent of blasphemous imaginations; but, “resist him, and he will flee from thee<sup>b</sup>.” “Take the shield of faith.” Trust that the Lord Jesus, thy Saviour and thy shield<sup>i</sup>, will graciously enable thee, “to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one;” and according to thy faith, it will be unto thee. All Satan’s attempts to hurry thee into sin, shall be as effectually disarmed of their force, by that shield, as fire is, of its strength, by being quenched. To distrust thy almighty Redeemer, or to doubt that thou art not a true believer, because thou art thus harassed by Satan; is a much greater sin, than all his suggestions put together, however numerous they may be.

7. Believers diminish their comfort much, by *not watching habitually, against corruption within, and temptation from without.*

A good man loses much of his holy comfort, by not observing cautiously and constantly, *the motions of sin in his heart.* When he doth not accustom himself, strictly to watch these, in order to detect, resist, and mortify them<sup>k</sup>, as early as they begin to appear; they will speedily acquire such force, as will urge him on violently and irresistably, to thoughts, words, and acts of sin. If he would retain comfortable fellowship with an infinitely holy God, he must watch diligently, the first motions and sallies of depravity in his heart; in order that,

<sup>b</sup> James iv. 7.

<sup>i</sup> Ps. xxviii. 7.

<sup>k</sup> Rom. viii. 13.

by the lively exercise of the contrary graces, he may resist them without delay: for if he do not, in such a case, instantly try to exercise his graces, and especially his faith; Satan, who is always envious and watchful, will seize that opportunity, to exercise his corruptions: and if, by being negligent to watch and resist the first motions of corruption in his heart, he suffer them often to obtain such force, as to gain the consent of his will to actual transgression; he can have none to blame but himself, for the loss of his holy consolation<sup>1</sup>.

Seeing the remaining depravity of the heart, is not only itself, a source of temptation to actual sin<sup>m</sup>, but is the inlet for all temptations from Satan and the world<sup>n</sup>; the believer, if he would retain spiritual consolation, must likewise be ever upon his guard, against *temptations from without*. If he cease, for a short while, to watch against those temptations of Satan, which that deceitful adversary manages in a way of subtilty and stratagem, he will soon be so insnared by one or more of them, as to fall into sin. Alas! Spiritual wickednesses in high places, which are every moment, watching for opportunities to insnare his soul, are so many, and so powerful, and so subtile; that it is in vain for the exercised Christian, to hope that he shall be able to retain his comfort, if he cease but for a moment to watch<sup>o</sup>. Though he cannot shut Satan wholly out of his imagination, he should however be very cautious, that he do not, even in the smallest measure, provide fuel for his flame.

<sup>1</sup> Jer. ii. 19.<sup>m</sup> James i. 14.<sup>n</sup> Jer. xvii. 9.<sup>o</sup> Eph. vi. 12.

He should, for this purpose, often pray in faith, that the Lord would so set a watch upon his eyes and his ears, as to enable him, constantly to reject and repel every appearance of temptation to sin. And if he would not be tempted by the men of the world, who are also the inveterate enemies of his comfort, he must always keep himself at a due distance from them. Christian, the snares of Satan and of his emissaries, are continually set for thee. "Be sober therefore and vigilant<sup>p</sup>:" "Watch thou in all things<sup>q</sup>;" and "watch unto prayer and supplication in the Spirit, with all perseverance<sup>r</sup>." If thou wouldst retain thy comfort, shake off carnal security, and take good heed, lest thy spiritual enemies surprise and overcome thee. Be continually solicitous to espy temptations, while they are yet at a distance, in order to prevent them from surprising thee: and that thou mayst be enabled to do so, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might<sup>s</sup>." Trust that the Lord Jesus will, and pray that he may, "strengthen thee with all might, according to his glorious power, by his Spirit in the inner man<sup>t</sup>."

8. Believers likewise forfeit their spiritual comfort, by presuming, without necessity, *to omit repeatedly some known duty*. When the Lord declar-eth, in the lxxxixth Psalm, That he will visit the transgression of the spiritual seed of Messiah, with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; the phrases, by which, he expresseth the sins or modes of sinning, which would procure for them, his pa-

<sup>p</sup> 1 Pet. v. 8.

<sup>q</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 5.

<sup>r</sup> Eph. vi. 18.

<sup>s</sup> Eph. vi. 10.

<sup>t</sup> Col. i. 11. Eph. iii. 16.

ternal chastisements, are four : and it is remarkable, that he employs three of them, to express the *omission of duties*, and but one, to express the direct commission of sins.—“ If his children *forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments ; if they break, or, profane my statutes, and keep not my commandments ; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes*.” Though sins of commission do, indeed, expose believers to fatherly chastisements ; yet, I believe it will be found, that sins of omission do it much more frequently : because they are oftener guilty of these, and they yield to them, with less struggle and remorse, than they do, to sins of commission. The spiritual declension of a Christian, especially at its beginning, discovers itself, for the most part, more by the customary omission of some duties, than by the positive commission of crimes<sup>u</sup>. For, although the omission of a present duty, is indeed a sin ; yet, it doth not usually appear to a declining Christian, at first view, to be so horrible, as the direct commission of a known transgression. And therefore nothing commonly, but some violent and strong temptation can, at first, impel him to the downright perpetration of a crime ; whereas, a very small temptation will often suffice, to move him to the neglect of an ordinance, or the omission of a duty. If he should happen to be, at any time, fatigued more than usually ; or, to be under a very slight bodily distemper ; or, to have less time, or less accommodation, than usual ; or, to be disturbed, and ruffled in his temper ; or, to be receiving or

<sup>u</sup> Ps. lxxxix. 30—32.

<sup>w</sup> Isa. xliii. 22—24.

paying visits, &c.—any one of these, will probably suffice, as a temptation, to prevail with him to shift off, at such a time, secret prayer, or family-worship, or even public worship, or some other present duty; or at least, to perform them in a cold and superficial manner. And having once begun to admit such frivolous excuses, he may, perhaps, be permitted for a season, to offer to his conscience, almost any sort of occurrence, as an excuse for omitting the stated performance of one or other of these duties. On such occasions, he commonly neglects likewise the exercise of his graces, especially, of his faith and repentance; and, it may be, takes occasion, either from his sins or from his duties, to do so. Or, perhaps, he suffers himself to neglect for a season, some *relative* duty <sup>x</sup>, or at least, to perform it not “heartily, as unto the Lord <sup>y</sup>.” Now, inasmuch as every omission of known duty, is a sin against God <sup>z</sup>; the Christian, by allowing himself for a season, often to neglect some known duty, or not to perform it cheerfully <sup>a</sup>, grieves the Holy Spirit of God, and provokes Him to suspend consolation from his soul. When he thus presumes to make the Spirit sad, he must not expect, that the Spirit will continue, as formerly, to make him glad. The moment, his heart withdraws and hangs off from any present duty, as if it were an unpleasant or irksome task, it does in the same proportion, withdraw from the Lord; and so, it loses the comfort of serving Him, as well as of communion with him <sup>b</sup>. To resolve

<sup>x</sup> Eph. vi. 2, 3.    <sup>1</sup> Tim. v. 8.

<sup>y</sup> Col. iii. 23.

<sup>z</sup> James iv. 17.

<sup>a</sup> Mal. i. 13, 14.

<sup>b</sup> John xiv. 21.

to omit a present duty, is even more sinful, than actually to omit it, without *intending* so to do<sup>c</sup>. Ah! how heinous a sin is it, to be disposed, and without necessity, to be resolved, either to omit or to curtail, a single religious or moral duty! It shews how little regard, a man has, to the glorious Majesty of heaven, when he can put *Him* off, with slight and curtailed service<sup>d</sup>. Such behaviour as this, will soon, very soon, raise such a thick and dark cloud, as will intercept the cheering beams of the Sun of righteousness, from the soul. Alas! the omission, or slight performance of many duties, is far from being considered and lamented, by true Christians, as it ought to be.

I have already said that, a believer loses his comfort, by omitting repeatedly, and without necessity, some *known* duty: I must now go further, and add that, If he live for a long time; in the omission of some duty, which he doth *not yet know* to be a duty; but, which he might have known to have been required of him, if he had diligently availed himself of his opportunities to know it;—this instance of neglect may lie concealed, as a gnawing worm, at the root of his comfort. His neglecting the study of the moral law, in its spirituality and great extent, as his rule of duty<sup>e</sup>, so as to continue ignorant of his duty, in any one point; is, when opportunity is graciously afforded him, for attaining this know-

<sup>c</sup> Rev. ii. 4.

<sup>d</sup> Mal. i. 6—8.

<sup>e</sup> The clearest and fullest exposition of the ten commandments, that I have yet seen, is that of BOSTON, in his Sermons on the Shorter Catechism.

ledge, a greater sin, than it ever will be possible for him, or even for the highest angel, to comprehend. It is not enough, in order to retain spiritual comfort, that a holy man study well the promises of the gospel: he must likewise study diligently the precepts of the law, in order to *obey* them <sup>f</sup>.

9. Believers procure for themselves the loss of comfort, by *sitting down contented with their spiritual attainments*. When a good man so far forgets himself, as to rest satisfied for a time, with his present degree of knowledge, or faith, or holiness, and to become remiss in his efforts to attain more and more of these; when he begins and continues, to be so well pleased with his degree of knowledge, as to read and hear the gospel, with less relish and less diligence, than formerly; to be so delighted with his measure of faith and experience, as neither to complain so much of his unbelief, nor to be so diligent and frequent in his actings of faith, as in times past; and, to be so fond of his attainments in holiness, as to be less diligent than formerly, in pressing toward perfection; he may assure himself, that he shall thereby lose the comfort of communion with a holy and a jealous God. If he accustom himself for a season, not only, so to rest *in* his religious attainments, as to be less eager in pursuing after higher degrees of holiness; but, to rest *on* them, or place his confidence in them; he adopts hereby, the surest method of losing at once, the sight and the comfort of them <sup>g</sup>. In proportion as he trusts in

<sup>f</sup> Ps. cxix. 92, 165. <sup>g</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 25. Ps. xxx. 6, 7.



his own knowledge, or faith, or holiness, or pleasant frames, in the prospect of any duty, which he may be about to perform, instead of trusting *only* in Christ; or, in proportion as he looks to them for comfort, instead of looking solely to Him; he prefers them before him. He idolizes them: he makes a saviour and a comforter of them, instead of Jesus Christ; or at least, he suffers them to share with Him, in that honour. He relies on grace received, and so trusteth in his own heart. This is one sure way, in which, he provokes the Lord to hide his gracious countenance from him, and to cover his evidences with a cloud in his anger<sup>a</sup>. Spiritual comforts if they be rested on, shall, as effectually as earthly ones, keep a man from comfortable communion with Christ. When the Lord Jesus vouchsafes to him, the comfort of spiritual attainments, it is not that he may live upon it; but, that he may be incited and encouraged by it, to persevere in holy faith and evangelical obedience. But if he, on the contrary, allow himself to be elated with his attainments or comforts, and, like Hezekiah, invite others to see his treasures; then, it will be time for the Lord, to send the messengers of his anger, to carry away from his view these idols, which steal away his heart from Him. When his heart is swelling with self-importance, and self-confidence, all that is then poured on it, runs over into the gulf of self-conceit, and self-sufficiency. If he rely upon his own wisdom and strength, in the prospect, especially of difficult duties; he must not think it strange, if

<sup>a</sup> Luke ix. 33, 34.

he should soon become discouraged and disconsolate. When he presumes to rest on the acting of his faith, rather than upon the glorious Object of it, and to draw consolation from that, rather than from this; he so far prefers the act before the Object, and becomes guilty of idolatry<sup>1</sup>. But, when he at length begins, in his practical judgment, habitually to prefer receiving all his strength and comfort directly from Christ, to having them in and of himself, even if he might; his consolation by Christ, will continue, and even abound<sup>2</sup>.

10. Christians deprive themselves of holy consolation, *by their indolence, in the exercise of graces, and performance of duties.* We read in the Song of Solomon<sup>1</sup>, that the Church lost the comfort of a gracious visit from Christ, by her sluggishness; which disposed her to neglect entertaining Him so kindly, as she ought, and as the kindness of his manifestation of himself, required. When any of the saints have, by "joy and peace in believing," and by "rejoicing in hope," found that, "in keeping his commandments, there is great reward;" and yet, afterwards become slothful in the service of Christ, counting his yoke uneasy and his burden heavy; "shall he not visit for these things?" They need not wonder that they lose their sense of his favour, when they are conscious that they often pray for his grace, as if they prayed not; when, by their criminal indifference, and the coldness of their petitions, they shew that they do not care much, whether these be

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xvi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5. 1 Pet. i. 3.

<sup>1</sup> Song v. 2—6.

granted or not. Were they duly concerned for the welfare of their souls, they would frequently refresh them, by exercising holy meditation and faith; as they do their bodies, by receiving food, thrice or oftener in the day. Diligence in holy exercises and moral duties, is not only a debt to the Lord, but a privilege to believers themselves; and therefore by being slothful, they discover at once injustice and unkindness; a contempt of the glorious Majesty of heaven, and a neglect of his redeeming mercy. When the Saviour draweth near, and they regard it not; when He knocketh, and they open not; it is indeed high time that, by withholding the comfort of his gracious visits, from them, he should chastise their negligence, and rouse them to diligence<sup>m</sup>. It is equitable, as well as reasonable, that the consequence of spiritual sloth should be, a loss of sensible consolation. Accordingly, in the administration of the covenant of grace, an intimate connection is established, between diligence in holy duties, and the fruition of spiritual comforts. The indolent Christian *cannot* retain tranquillity of mind<sup>n</sup>. What heavenly consolation must he lose, for instance, by his criminal inattention to the precious promises of God, and even to the daily dispensations of his holy providence, to him! If his love, which was once an ascending flame, become a feeble spark; if his penitential sorrow, which once, like Jordan, overflowed all its banks, become "like a brook in summer;" if his zeal, which formerly did eat him up, be devoured by leanness or declension; if he who,

<sup>m</sup> Prov. x. 4. Heb. xi. 6.    <sup>n</sup> Heb. vi. 11.

in times past, could not "give sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eye-lids," till Jesus gave rest to his soul, can lie down securely, with contracted guilt in his conscience; and if he, who formerly was diligent in spiritual exercise and holy obedience, become remiss and regardless; he thereby makes a wide breach, for the entrance of spiritual trouble °. It is indeed mercifully, as well as wisely, appointed, that when he becomes indolent, his comfort should decline; in order that he may perceive in time, that he is in a languishing condition, and may without delay, entreat the Lord Jesus to restore his soul. Besides, if the Lord did not, on such occasions, withdraw himself, the Christian would not prize his gracious presence highly, nor think it so comfortable, as it is. Believer, "be not then slothful in business; but be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord<sup>p</sup>." See that, by grace received daily from the fulness of Christ, thy soul be vigorous and active in his holy service<sup>q</sup>. Be always diligent, in attempting the exercise of grace, in using the means of grace, and in doing every good work, in the strength of promised grace. If persons linger on a journey, they are sometimes benighted; if thou become slothful, in exercising thy graces, or in performing thy duties; wonder not, if thou begin to walk in darkness. Be continually on thy guard, then, against every appearance of inward declension, and especially, against slothfulness in the exercise of direct confidence in Christ, and of secret prayer.

° Prov. xix 15. Hos. v. 15.

<sup>p</sup> Rom. xii. 11.

<sup>q</sup> Eccles. ix. 10.

11. Believers suffer a diminution of their spiritual comfort, by having and entertaining, *a low estimation of the counsels and comforts* of the Holy Spirit of Christ. When they allow themselves, for a season, to entertain a light esteem of the counsels, or ordinances, or promises, or influences, or comforts, of the blessed Spirit; when they receive these, but not gratefully, or keep them, but not diligently; they thereby dishonour and grieve the Holy Spirit himself, who is the glorious Author of them. An earthly Sovereign would account himself dishonoured, if his proclamations, or pardons, or favours, should not be entertained with high regard, especially by those, who are not only the subjects of his dominion, but the objects of his favour. In like manner, if they, who are the subjects of the Spirit's gracious influences, and the objects of his peculiar favour, do not account his word their treasure, his promises their joy, his Sabbaths their delight, and his consolations, their felicity; they so far treat Himself with indignity: and the more exalted and glorious, the adorable Spirit is, the more sinful, the indignity is, which is thereby offered him. Besides, if, in their practical judgment, they prefer mean and even sinful objects, before the great things of the Spirit; such as, the wisdom and the maxims of the world, before His counsels; the comforts and the pleasures of the world, before His consolations; the riches and the honours of the world, before the honour of holy conformity to Him, and of intimate communion with him; they do thereby, offer an infinite affront to his glorious Majesty. For, what greater dishonour can they reflect upon the holy and blessed Spirit, than prac-

tically, to shew greater regard to a creature, to a vain creature, yea, to an enemy, than to Him! Ah! when a Christian's desire to the food of his soul, is almost gone; when he appears, as if he had been surfeited with the gospel; when Divine ordinances, instead of being highly esteemed, are basely slighted by him; and when his heart is more set upon his farm or merchandise, than upon seasons of communion with God in Christ; he must not be surprised, if he should, for a season, be taught the worth of these inestimable blessings, by the want of them. Or when, by poring constantly upon the sins of his heart, and of his life, and by setting the demerit of these, as it were, in battle-array, against the merit of the great Redeemer's consummate righteousness, he makes little account of the offers and promises of the blessed gospel; he must blame none but himself, for his loss of comfort. O Christian, consider well these words of the apostle Paul:—"To be spiritually minded is *life and peace*". Endeavour to attain without delay, a more spiritual and clear discernment of the things of the Spirit. Pray frequently and fervently, for more acquaintance with them, and for more complacency in them. Learn to form such a low estimate of the creature, as to expect *nothing* from it; and such a high esteem of the Lord Jesus, as to expect *all* from Him: so shalt thou be exempted from those frequent, and galling disappointments, which cannot but render the life of a believer uncomfortable\*. Wert thou to love thy redeeming God, so much, as habitually

\* Rom. viii. 6.

\* Ps. cxlvi. 5.

to come before Him in his ordinances, with *delight* in him, and to go away, with *desire* to him; thou shouldst always retain the comfort of communion with him <sup>t</sup>.

12. True Christians deprive themselves of comfort, *by presuming to pray for things, which are not suitable to their condition*; and which, it would not be consistent with the scheme of their salvation, to grant them at present, nor indeed at any time. When they venture repeatedly to ask in prayer, something which the Lord seeth to be improper for them, and not necessary to subserve the wise purposes of his glory, in their sanctification; "They ask, and receive not, because they ask amiss<sup>u</sup>." If, for instance, they pray that, as much grace might be given them at once, as would be sufficient for them all their life-time<sup>v</sup>; if they peremptorily ask sensible manifestations, great enlargements, and high extacies of joy; if they pray for any comfort whatever, without resolving to use diligently, *all the other* appointed means of attaining it; if they entreat the removal of any affliction, before they have been rightly exercised under it<sup>x</sup>; and, if they pray absolutely for *a certain measure*, of the good things of this life;—the Lord will not, and indeed cannot, in mercy to them, grant such petitions. The consequence often is, that after having, it may be, waited long for answers without receiving any, they become discouraged and disconsolate. Moreover, when they venture in prayer, to prescribe to the Lord, *a way and a time*

<sup>t</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 4. and lxxi. 21.

<sup>v</sup> John iv. 15.

<sup>u</sup> James iv. 3.

<sup>x</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 8.

of appearing for their help; and when the Lord, as he will surely do, refuseth to come for their salvation, in that particular way, and at that very time<sup>1</sup>; they take occasion from that refusal, to yield to inquietude and discouragement: or, when they venture to propose the Lord's particular way of treating some other believers, as the way in which, they desire that he would deal with them; and find that, they are not gratified likewise in this; they, sometimes, begin to yield to discouraging and desponding thoughts. Thus, they presume to limit the holy One of Israel, who hath resolved to act as an infinite Sovereign, in his manner of bringing all his saints to glory. Believers, if they would retain spiritual consolation, would do well to consider, that it is only such petitions, as are for things unnecessary, and even hurtful to them, that the Lord refuseth to grant; that he never denieth any of them, without a sufficient reason, and that he sometimes condescends to shew them the reason<sup>2</sup>; that he never refuseth, but when they ask what is not good, or rather, what is not *best* for them, at the time referred to; and, that although they do not receive what they come for, yet he allows them, that which is sufficient to bear their charges in coming and going, and invites them to come again. They ought also to consider, that those are not the holiest, nor the greatest of believers, whose sense is the most indulged. Believing Mary, is forbidden to touch Jesus; and disbelieving Thomas, is commanded to thrust his hand into his side. Christian, if thou

<sup>1</sup> 2-Kings v. 11.<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.



wouldst, from time to time, be comforted with answers of peace to thy prayers, offer up to the Lord no unwarrantable desires; no desires, but for things which are agreeable to his revealed will; and no desires, but in the name of Christ, and by the help of the Spirit. Ask nothing; on purpose to consume it upon thy pleasures<sup>a</sup>. Regulate always thy petitions, by the promises of the everlasting covenant; which comprise all that is good for thee, in time and through eternity, and infinitely more than thou art able to ask or think<sup>b</sup>.

13. They procure for themselves, the loss of holy comfort, by *yielding* for a season, to such temptations, as urge them to *attempt things in religion, that are impracticable*. When Satan perceives that he cannot persuade the Christian, especially the young and unexperienced Christian, to live in the neglect of any known duty; he, sometimes, presses him vehemently, to a rash and quick performance of some difficult duty. He suggests to him, that the Lord is a hard Master; that he delighteth in requiring difficult duties, duties too, which must be performed speedily, and that, on the pain of incurring his infinite displeasure; that, like a tyrannical ruler, who makes laws in order to ensnare his subjects, he commands duties which are oppressive, and doth it with unrelenting rigour; and that, he requires them to be done with the utmost degree of exactness, or else he will not accept them. Now, so far as a good man yields to this horrible temptation, he presumes to imagine, that the commandments of God are grievous, that the yoke of

<sup>a</sup> James iv. 3.

<sup>b</sup> Eph. iii. 20.

Christ is hard. Apprehending the Lord Jesus to be a rigorous Master, he, under the prevalence of slavish fear<sup>c</sup>, performs even the easiest of his duties, without courage, without affection, and even with aversion. His comfort accordingly is destroyed, his heart is dejected, his hands are weakened.

Moreover, Satan sometimes urges him, to attempt the doing of several things *at once*, which he well knows is impossible. And the moment he yields to this temptation, his heart begins to be so divided, his thoughts to be so perplexed, and his attention to be so distracted, between a multiplicity of objects which crowd into his view, that he becomes incapable of performing any duty well. Endeavouring to grasp too much, he lets all slip.

Whatever he tries to perform, he does it superficially and unseasonably. When he is called to perform one duty, he is, perhaps, addressing himself to another; and, like Martha, he is “careful and troubled about many things<sup>d</sup>.” The great rule of every duty is this;—“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, *do it with thy might*<sup>e</sup> ;” that is, ‘Let thy heart be wholly intent upon, and occupied with that *one* duty, while thou art performing it.’ Indeed, it cannot otherwise be performed, either acceptably or comfortably.

The tempter also will, sometimes, instigate those of the saints, who are called to perform a greater variety of duties than others are, to continue longer than is requisite, in doing some one duty; in order to put it out of their power, rightly to discharge some other, equally incumbent on them.

<sup>a</sup> 1 John iv. 18.    <sup>d</sup> Luke x. 41.    <sup>e</sup> Eccles. ix. 10

He will press them, for instance, either to employ so much time in the worship of the family, and especially, in that of the closet, as to have no opportunity for some other duty equally necessary; or to spend so much time, in some duty respecting their secular affairs, as to have almost no opportunity for those holy and necessary exercises. In proportion as a good man yields for a time, to this temptation; it is easy to see that, he thereby deprives himself of that comfort of communion with a holy God, which is enjoyed only, in a conscientious and seasonable discharge of *every* known duty. Now, in order to prevent his falling into this destructive snare, he ought daily to trust, as well as to pray, that the Lord Jesus, who is given "for a leader to the people<sup>f</sup>," would according to his promise<sup>g</sup>, guide him continually to that which, in preference to every other, is *his present* duty. And when he discerns his present duty, he should resolutely, and in the faith of the promise, dispatch that, and then proceed, in the same manner, to his next duty. Let him diligently perform every act of obedience, in its proper season; and, that he may have opportunity for every one, let him so redeem his time, as to spend no time in idleness, or in doing any thing but that which his conscience pronounces to be his present duty<sup>h</sup>.

14. Believers forfeit the continuance of their spiritual comfort, by the commission of *gross, and atrocious transgressions*; of such sins as are contrary, not only to the light of Revelation, but even to the light of nature. By doing so, they rebel

<sup>f</sup> Isa. lv. 4.

<sup>g</sup> Isa. lviii. 11.

<sup>h</sup> Eph. v. 15, 16.

against, and “vex the Holy Spirit, so that he is turned,” as it were, “to be their enemy, and to fight against them<sup>1</sup>.” By such iniquities, they at the same time, wound and waste their own consciences. When a holy man presumes to resemble the men of this world so much, as to commit but one of the sins mentioned in 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.; or any other heinous iniquity; he thereby pierces the Lord Jesus, grieves the Holy Spirit, inflicts a deep wound in his own conscience, and so procures for himself, the loss of holy consolation. We see, in some of the penitential Psalms of David, that his adultery and murder, not only deprived him of sensible comfort; but exposed him, and that for a long season, to Divine desertion, in respect even of quickening and purifying influences. We know also, that Peter’s denial of his blessed Lord, rendered him, for a time, very disconsolate. If a good man, then, instigated either by corruption within, or by temptation from without, suffer himself, not only to contemplate with desire, but actually to fall into, any of those enormities which, by one apostle, are termed, “The works of the flesh<sup>k</sup>,” and by another, “The pollutions of the world<sup>l</sup>,” he exposes himself, in an uncommon degree, to the dreadful frowns of his heavenly Father: for such enormities, as they are directly opposite even to the light of nature, so they are most contrary to the influences of grace. The sin of a believer in falling into any one of them, is deeply aggravated from all his manifold privileges, and more especially from this; that he usually has

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lxiii. 10.   <sup>k</sup> Gal. v. 19—21.   <sup>l</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 20.

more strength afforded him, against gross enormities, than even against sins which are more spiritual, and less obvious to his view. The means of being kept from falling into gross iniquities, which the Christian ought diligently to use, are such as these: trust in Christ, at all times, for continual supplies of sanctifying grace, prayer without ceasing, and without fainting; watchfulness unto prayer, and against his spiritual enemies, with all perseverance; and keeping a constant guard, more especially, against pride of heart, confidence in grace received, and the evil that is in the world.

15. Christians likewise destroy the peace and comfort of their minds, by *open sins* of any kind, which *offend others around them, and cause many of them to stumble*. When any of the saints, commit such sins as are exposed to the view of others, and thereby grieve, or offend, or stumble them; the Lord is greatly dishonoured and displeased, and his Holy Spirit is so grieved, as to suspend for a time, his cheering influences from their souls. He, in this way, frequently imbitters those sins to his people, by which they have offended others, and have given them occasion to reproach his blessed religion, and to blaspheme his holy name. After David had sinned openly, in the matter of Uriah, Nathan said to him, "Because by this deed, thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord, to *blaspheme*, the child also that is born unto thee, shall surely die<sup>m</sup>." The Lord charged it, as a deeply aggravated sin, upon his ancient people, that, by the unholy and offensive behaviour of many

<sup>m</sup> 2 Sam. xii. 14.

of them, they occasioned "his holy name to be profaned among the heathen". If blasphemy is justly allowed to be a most atrocious crime; doubtless, it must be a heinous iniquity, especially in any of the children of God, to give occasion to it. When they at any time fall openly into dishonesty, or pride, or passion, or revenge, or unbecoming discourse, and especially into covetousness; the enemies of the gospel, never fail to take special notice of it, and to take occasion from it, to become the more confirmed, in their inveterate prejudices against faith and holiness. These sins therefore do, as much as more enormous evils that are committed in secret, procure for believers the loss of spiritual comfort. "For the iniquity of his covetousness," saith Jehovah, "was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth". When, after spiritual enlargement, and communion with God in holy exercises, Christians become negligent in glorifying him by good works before men; when, as soon as they have come down from the mount, they, like Moses, break the tables of the holy law; such ungrateful and inconsistent behaviour as this, often provokes their heavenly Father to chasten them, by the infliction of *inward*, as well as of outward trouble. By presuming to sin openly, they not only offend and grieve the Holy Spirit, but *trouble and discourage* other saints around them; and therefore it is proper, that they themselves should feel spiritual trouble, and should know by their own bitter experience, "That it is

\* Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 23. Rom. ii. 24.    \* Isa. lvii. 17.

an evil thing and bitter, that they have forsaken the Lord their God <sup>P</sup>.”

16. Lastly, Believers procure for themselves the loss of holy comfort, by *relapsing often into the same sin*. What sin soever it be, and how strong soever the temptation to it be; the repeated, and especially, the *frequent* commission of it, will provoke the Holy Spirit, to withhold his consoling influences from the backsliding Christian. This will more especially be the case, if, under the prevalence of corruption, and the power of temptation, he suffer himself to resemble so much the secure hypocrite, as to take the smallest encouragement from the riches of redeeming grace in Christ, to repeat the same offence. By his daring to do so, he “maketh Christ the minister of sin<sup>Q</sup>” he practically represents the holy Jesus and his great salvation, as leaving him still under the dominion of sin, yea, as affording him encouragement to practise iniquity. Besides, by relapsing often into the same transgression, the Christian practically declares, that he still loves, and has pleasure in that sin. Now, by loving that which is inexpressibly hateful, and which the Lord hateth with infinite abhorrence; and by counting that pleasant to his taste, which is of all things the most bitter, and which tendered to the Saviour’s lips, the vinegar and gall; the believer renders it indispensably necessary, that the sweet and holy consolations of the Spirit, be suspended from him; in order that, he may be made to see, that his iniquity is most hateful, and to experience, that it is most bitter.

<sup>P</sup> Jer. ii. 19.

<sup>Q</sup> Gal. ii. 17.

Moreover, the repetition of a transgression *heightens* the crime. As, in figures, the addition of one figure, makes the number ten times greater; so the Christian's repetition of the same sin, of a sin which he has often confessed, lamented, and resolved against; renders it heinous in a tenfold degree, and calls aloud for paternal chastisement. In such a case, he must be taught, not only by the anguish of the Redeemer's soul, in the garden and on the cross, but by the trouble of his own spirit, that sin is of all evils the greatest; and that his having fallen again and again, into the same offence, after he had received the forgiveness of sins, renders his sin exceeding sinful<sup>r</sup>. And if, after he has, for his disobedience, been chastened with *outward* affliction, he, nevertheless, turns again to the same offence; this will, if infinite mercy prevent it not, inevitably expose him to *inward* distress, which is inexpressibly more dreadful and intolerable. Ah! when a man, who hath believed through grace, presumes to cast a propitious eye upon some easily besetting sin, and secretly to say, "Is it not a little one? and my soul shall live;" he is not aware, how effectually, he thereby robs his soul of holy comfort. If, after having often complained to the Lord, of his unbelief, pride, self-confidence, deadness, frowardness, censoriousness, and other evils; he still is ready, on almost every occasion, to gratify, if not to excuse and vindicate them; does he not hereby resemble the hypocrite? and is it not proper, that he should for a season, be deprived of the comfort of

<sup>r</sup> Ezra ix. 13, 14. Mal. ii. 13.



seeing, that he is a *sincere* believer; and also, that he should be left under the prevalence of perplexing fears, that he has hitherto been, and at present is, but a hypocrite? I do not say, that a man's relapsing for a time, again and again into the same transgression, proves him to be a hypocrite; for God hath nowhere promised such a degree of strength, to his people, during their state of imperfection, as will set them beyond the possibility of relapsing for a season, into the same offence<sup>b</sup>: but I affirm, that a true Christian's doing so, makes him appear *very like* a hypocrite, obscures his evidences of sincerity, renders his condition inexpressibly dreadful, and exposes him to a very severe chastisement. Believer, if this be thy present condition, O apply, and without delay plead, this gracious promise, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely<sup>c</sup>;" and, in the faith of it, watch and strive with holy resolution, especially against "the sin which doth so easily beset thee." Know, that thy redeeming God hath made an unalterable, an eternal separation, between the love of sin, and the joy of salvation. O endeavour diligently, to become eminent, especially in that grace, which is more immediately the opposite of thy constitutional sin. Wouldst thou wish to keep down doubts and fears, and to keep up faith and comfort? Shun, O shun every occasion, and every appearance, especially of *that* sin<sup>d</sup>. Be persuaded that, the pleasure of overcoming, even the most easily besetting sin, is inconceivably greater, than the pleasure of committing it.

<sup>b</sup> Prov. xxiv. 16.<sup>c</sup> Hos. xiv. 4.<sup>d</sup> 1 Thess. v. 22.

FROM the foregoing particulars, the disconsolate believer may plainly see, that he has *none to blame but himself*, for his loss of holy consolation. When he is bewailing his want of peaceful tranquillity, or of holy joy, he must complain of none but himself. It is he himself that takes, and even forces away, his own comfort: for, by his aggravated sins, he hath rendered it *necessary*, that the Lord should hide his face from him. Indeed, he never sins against God, without sinning, at the same time, against his own soul. We read in the Scriptures, That we must forgive our enemies, but never in express terms, That we must forgive—our *friends*. The iniquities of God's own people, are the most provoking to him: and though he hath forgiven them all, as to the guilt of eternal wrath; yet, as in the case of Moses, he may refuse to forgive some of them, in respect of the guilt of paternal anger. The iniquity of others, “is marked before him;” but “the sin of Judah, is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond<sup>w</sup>.” The friends of Christ, then, must be ever on their guard against sin, especially against wilful sin. Sinning wilfully, will assuredly weaken their hands, and bring trouble into their consciences.

Does a good man forfeit his holy comfort, by making his graces, or performances, or lively frames, his ground of right to trust in Jesus for salvation? He should hence learn the need that he has, to be daily exercising himself in *mortifying the legal spirit*, which remains in him. It is *this*, that prompts him to make his graces and du-

<sup>w</sup> Jer. xvii. 1.

ties, his warrant to renew his actings of trust in the Saviour; and thereby, to forfeit the comfort of his soul. Next to unbelief itself, his legal temper is, perhaps, the worst enemy of his pure consolation. It is a secret and subtle foe, that seems to intend him a kindness; whilst it is always putting him, upon seeking for some good qualifications in himself, on the ground of which, he may trust that God loveth him, and that Christ saveth him. Let him, therefore, if he would retain spiritual comfort, be diligent in mortifying his self-righteous spirit; and know that, the way to conquer and destroy it, is, by faith, to bring daily into his conscience a better hope, from a better righteousness than that of the law. All the spiritual distress of the exercised Christian, may be traced to a legal spirit in him. He seldom wants comfort, but by looking less or more to his own righteousness, instead of looking off, to the consummate righteousness of Jesus Christ " ". Believer, it is not sufficient, in

" " The Author of an excellent Sermon, in pointing out some of the injuries which believers sustain, by the prevalence of the legal temper, expresses himself thus: — ' It spoils them of their comfort, and brings a damp of sorrow and dejection, over their spirits. None have such ground of comfort as believers; and did they know how to improve their privilege; did they live daily in the faith of the gospel, and in the comforts of their new state, they would be the most cheerful persons in the world: but the prevalence of this temper, like a moth, secretly worms out the very life of their comfort, and throws them into the depths of despondency. What comfort can they have, in the duties of religion, when they seek it from themselves, and from their duties? What comfort can they have, either in duty, or out of duty, in the absence of their God?'

order to maintain spiritual comfort, that thou dost not rely on thy graces and performances, for a title to eternal life. Thou must not presume to rely on them, for even so much as a right to trust in Christ: thou must not make them, the smallest part of thy warrant, to renew thy exercise of confidence in him.

Again: Do believers lose their holy consolation, by living upon their comfort, rather than upon the holy Comforter himself, and by loving the former, as much as, or more than, the latter? They may hence perceive that, it is sinful and very displeasing to the Lord, to *rely upon the comfort already given them*, or to love consolation in the streams, *more than, or even as much as*, comfort in the fountain. He taketh away sensible comfort from them, because they have loved it inordinately, or loved it too much; and because he would teach them effectually, the necessity of loving the adorable Comforter Himself, more than all the sweet consolation, which they have received from him. They must not expect, that "the God of all comfort," will suffer them to let their love run waste upon their pleasant feelings. He will elevate it all to

'It robs them of their peace. As all true and solid peace is built upon justification by the blood of Christ, so it can only be maintained by the daily exercise of faith, in this comfortable doctrine. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom v. 1. But so far as the legal temper prevails, their peace is set upon another foundation; is built upon their enlargements in duty, their frames, and attainments in religion; and therefore must be unstable as water.' The Evangelical Preacher, vol. iii. p. 199.

himself. Because he loveth them, he will so chasten them, as to teach them to love himself supremely, and to live upon himself, in the absence of sensible delights. He will teach them to love him, more for that boundless ocean which is in himself, than for the few drops which he had shed upon them ; more for his own infinite benignity, than for the grace or comfort, which he hath communicated to them. He will thereby, at the same time, shew them, how weak their love of him is, when they love him chiefly for the comfort which they have received from him ; and how weak their faith is, when they live upon the streams, rather than upon the overflowing fountain of consolation.

Further : Do believers, by their aggravated offences, provoke the Lord at any time, so to hide his face from them, as to leave them in the dark, respecting the truth of grace in their hearts ? It follows that, though grace is always in the heart of a holy man, yet he is *not always* able to discern it there.. His heart is always the seat of the principles and habits of grace ; and yet, he doth not continually enjoy the comfort of perceiving them. The figures of a sun-dial, continue to be plainly marked upon it ; and yet we cannot see by it, what hour of the day it is, unless the sun shine upon it. It is only, when graces are in *exercise*, and when the glorious Sun of righteousness shineth upon them, that they can be seen. Let not, then, any of the saints conclude, that they never had, and that they now have not, a well-grounded assurance of their being in a state of grace ; because doubts of the truth of grace in them, do sometimes arise in their minds. Their assurance of personal

interest in Christ, is well-grounded and true, though it is far from being perfect. Their graces themselves are imperfect, and therefore that assurance of sense, which arises from the perception of them, must be imperfect likewise. Such believers, as resolve never to rejoice, till they attain perfect assurance, must resolve never to rejoice, while they are in this world. They should consider that, there are many degrees of real certainty, below a perfect degree of it; and that, they injure themselves much, when they call their *state* of grace into question, as often as they do not perceive clearly their *habits* of grace.

Once more: Is it only by sinning against the high and holy One, that believers lose the comfort of communion with him? They may hence discover, what reason they have to *abhor*, and with holy detestation, to *turn* from all manner of sin. Their iniquity has not only pierced the incarnate Redeemer, and grieved the Holy Spirit; but it pierces themselves through with many sorrows. It is the worst enemy of their souls. It incessantly strives to rob them of their purest and sweetest joys. Let them therefore without ceasing, strive against the motions, and mortify the members, of the body of sin that dwelleth in them. If they allow, even for a moment, sin to dwell *at ease* in them; it will assuredly deprive them of their holy tranquillity.

## CHAPTER IV.

OF THE GRIEVOUS CONSEQUENCES, OF THE CHRISTIAN'S HAVING LOST HIS SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION:

BY withholding spiritual consolation from the souls of any of his people, the Lord, in proportion as he doth it, is represented in the Scriptures, as *forsaking* or deserting them. His forsaking of them, in respect of comforting influences, either in a less or greater degree, is the same as, his withdrawing of the sensible influences and tokens of his special favour from their souls; or, as it is often expressed in the Scripture, his *hiding of his face* from them. When he so forsaketh them, or so hideth the light of his gracious countenance from them, as to suspend, in any measure, his influences of comfort from their souls; they lose, in the same measure, that consoling sense of his special favour and love to them, which hitherto they usually enjoyed. The meaning of God's hiding of his face from believers, may, in some degree, be understood from the opposite phrases, of his "causing his face to shine upon them," and, his "lifting up the light of his countenance upon them." These phrases appear to carry in them, an allusion to the shining forth of the *Shechinah*, in the ancient Tabernacle and Temple; that is, of the glorious lustre, which dwelt in the cloud, as the visible token of Jehovah's favour to the Israelites, and of that gracious presence with them, which he was pleased, on some solemn occasions, peculiarly to manifest. There may also

be in them, an allusion to the pleasant appearance of the countenance of a friend, in a superior station of life, when he converses familiarly with an inferior, whom he regards with peculiar favour. Accordingly Job, when mentioning the regard shewn him by his attendants says, “If I laughed on them, *or*, jested with them, they believed it not, and the light of my countenance they cast not down<sup>x</sup> ;” as if he had said, ‘They were, on an occasion so agreeable to them, solicitous to do nothing that would so displease me, as to make me frown on them.’ And when the Israelitish Church in captivity, prayed to be restored to her former freedom, she said, “Cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved<sup>y</sup> ;” that is, ‘Restore us to our former prosperity, and thereby manifest to us thy mercy and thy favour.’ On the other hand, God is said in Scripture, to hide his face from his children, or, not to cause his countenance to shine upon them ; when, as a mark of his paternal displeasure with their evil conduct, he suspendeth for a season, the wonted influences and tokens of his favour, from their souls. Such forsaking, therefore, or suspension of spiritual comfort, though sometimes intended as a *trial of their graces* ; yet, is oftener designed by their heavenly Father, as a *grievous chastisement for their sins*.

Now, the consequences of their loss of spiritual consolation, are especially the following :

1. *Trouble and sorrow of spirit*, are consequences of it. “Thou didst hide thy face,” saith David, “and I was troubled<sup>z</sup>.” And when he was driven

<sup>x</sup> Job xxix. 24.      <sup>y</sup> Ps. lxxx. 3.      <sup>z</sup> Ps. xxx. 7.



from the Sanctuary of Jehovah, in which the visible symbol of his favour was placed, and where the manifestations of his favour were enjoyed; the soul of that holy man, was cast down and disquieted in him<sup>a</sup>. Indeed, when a saint hath, especially by his own aggravated folly, *lost* the sense of his peace with God, he cannot but be troubled; and when he hath forfeited the sense of his joy in God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot but be sorrowful. “In the favour of God is life<sup>b</sup>.” When, therefore, a holy man loses his perception of that favour; “the sorrows of *death*, will more or less compass him, and the pains of hell, will get hold upon him: he shall find trouble and sorrow<sup>c</sup>.” And the more he is insensibly upheld, by sustaining and quickening influences; the more troubled and grieved, will he commonly be, for his loss of comforting influences. A prevailing persuasion of the favour of God in Christ, and of acceptance with him, is the ordinary attainment of the saints in this world. “The Lord will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints<sup>d</sup>.” But when a saint forfeits the light of God’s gracious countenance, and of holy comfort; he ordinarily at such a time, loses all sight of his evidences of grace: and when he cannot discern in himself, the smallest evidence of grace, or of his being an object of Divine favour, he cannot fail to be deeply dejected, and troubled in spirit. The sensible departure of a good and gracious God, from the holy soul, is, like the departure of the soul from the

<sup>a</sup> Ps. xlii. 5, 6.<sup>b</sup> Ps. xxx. 5.<sup>c</sup> Ps. cxvi. 3.<sup>d</sup> Ps. lxxxv. 3.

body,—painful and dreadful. In other losses, something still remains that is comfortable: when a believer loses his earthly friends, he hath still a heavenly Friend and Father, who is unchanging in his good-will to him, and to whom, he may always look for comfort: but, when this gracious, this matchless Friend himself, is apprehended to be lost, how perplexing, how grievous, how overwhelming is the loss! The heaviest of other losses is light, is tolerable, in comparison of this<sup>c</sup>. No wonder if, in such a condition, the Christian take up Jeremiah's mournful complaint, "When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me<sup>f</sup>." To lose the perception of the Saviour's love to him, is exceedingly distressing to a holy man.

As all the candles in the world, cannot make it day, when the sun is set; so all the comforts in the universe, cannot cheer the heart of such a man, in the absence of the Sun of righteousness. A holy soul, is like the flower that opens and shuts with the sun: if the Saviour shine upon it, it opens; but, if He withdraw the cheering light of his countenance, it closes itself and droops. It is, however, a comfort not to be forgotten, that when the Lord Jesus leaves a believing soul, he forsakes it not wholly; but always leaves something behind him in it, which makes it long for his return. Were he to desert it *wholly*, it would cease to long for him.

2. *Piercing convictions, and frightful views, of their innumerable sins, in their heinousness and demerit*, usually accompany this trouble of mind. In

<sup>c</sup> Prov. xviii. 14.

<sup>f</sup> Jer. viii. 18.

the darkness of night, fire is more easily seen at a distance, than in the light of day. When a holy man has lost the light of comfort, and is walking in darkness, he has usually a more clear and disquieting sight of his great transgressions, than when he is walking in the light of consolation. The sin of his nature, and the transgressions of his life, are, in their deep malignity, and dreadful demerit, then set in order before his eyes. The painful recollection of them, with their manifold aggravations, is revived in his mind; and they appear more horrible in his view, than ever they did before. They are brought afresh to his painful remembrance, as if they had been committed but yesterday. Being set in array before him, each of them gives to his disconsolate spirit, a new, and a deep wound; which increases the smart of his former wounds, and makes them bleed afresh. They present themselves to his troubled mind, with all their aggravations; as having been committed against God and Christ, against redeeming love and grace, against the law and the gospel, against mercies and judgments, against the warnings of conscience and the motions of the Holy Spirit, and against the patience and forbearance of that gracious God, who hath so loved him, as to give his only begotten Son to die for him. Holy Job, when in such a condition, said, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth <sup>s</sup>." And David, "My sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight <sup>h</sup>." "Mine iniqui-

<sup>s</sup> Job xiii. 26.<sup>h</sup> Ps. li. 3, 4.

ties have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me<sup>i</sup>." Thus the backsliding believer, is sent back again to mount Sinai, where he finds the devouring flames of the fiery law, flashing in his face. His convictions now are deeper, and his scorplings hotter, than perhaps they ever were before. The Lord permitteth the tremendous curse of the violated law, to re-enter his conscience; and thereby He shews him, the awful demerit of his innumerable offences<sup>k</sup>. Perceiving that, he hath sinned in the midst of evangelical light, of frequent checks of conscience, of manifold mercies, enjoyments, enlargements, and experiences; he begins, it may be, to dread, that he may have committed even the unpardonable sin. A sense of the horrible malignity, and dreadful demerit of his transgressions, strikes a deep impression on his soul, and makes his heart to tremble. His conscience upbraids him with his criminal folly, and his base ingratitude, in sinning against his gracious God and Saviour. Hence, cutting reflections, self-condemning and galling thoughts, often disquiet his mind<sup>l</sup>. He can now think almost of nothing, but the awful majesty, sovereignty, holiness, justice, and vengeance of the Lord. "He remembers God and is troubled<sup>m</sup>." His spirit is troubled, yea, overwhelmed, when he reflects that he hath provoked the just, the omnipotent, the great and terrible God, to appear as an enemy against him. Or, if he think at all of

<sup>i</sup> Ps. xl. 12.<sup>k</sup> Rom. v. 20.<sup>l</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 21, 22.<sup>m</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 3.

the *mercy* of God, he will be disposed to argue thus: 'Surely, if my transgressions had not been peculiarly heinous, or, if I had so much as a single spark of grace in me; an infinitely merciful God would not have thus forsaken me.' Ah! sin, committed against the high and holy Majesty of heaven, is a strange, a horrible thing! If the Lord should, at once, discover *fully* to the exercised Christian, all the hideousness of this infernal monster, the discovery would be utterly intolerable to him.

3. A distressing *apprehension*, that some *overwhelming judgment* will suddenly be inflicted upon them, because of their great offences, is often a consequence of their loss of holy comfort. Heman apprehended that such judgments were to come upon him, as would cut him off<sup>a</sup>. The disconsolate Christian, under a deep sense of accumulated guilt, is frequently struck with fear, that an offended God will inflict upon him, some sudden and terrible punishment. A filial and holy fear of Divine judgments, arising from the consideration of the great evil of sin, and of Jehovah's infinite righteousness, and abhorrence of iniquity, as well as of his tremendous wrath revealed against it; is, indeed, lawful, and should at all times be exercised by the saints. "O Lord, I have heard thy speech," says Habakkuk, "and was afraid<sup>o</sup>." And David, "Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments<sup>p</sup>." But, when a holy man has

<sup>a</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 5.    <sup>o</sup> Hab. iii. 2.    <sup>p</sup> Ps. cxix. 119, 120.

deprived himself of comfort, he commonly yields to a *slavish* and *excessive*, dread of the judgments of God. When he hears, that a thousand have fallen at his right hand, and ten thousand at his left, he trembles like a leaf of the forest. In such a condition, he is disposed to indulge a disquieting, distracting, and tormenting fear; a fear, which unsettles his mind, suspends his exercise of faith, disturbs his peace, destroys his hope, and instigates him to impatience, and to the use of unlawful means, in order to escape the danger that threatens him. A fear of this kind is very sinful, as well as unbecoming, in a true Christian: it alienates his heart from the Lord, and disqualifies him for the spiritual performance of his duty. Since he is walking in darkness, a thousand *imaginary* fears, disquiet and perplex his soul. He is now readier than formerly, to be imposed upon by imaginary dangers, and to be "in great fear, where no fear is." Although the Lord hath promised to him, that "no real evil shall befall him;" that no affliction shall ever come upon him, but what will issue from the greatest love, and terminate in the greatest good, to him; yet he can almost think of nothing, but of imminent danger on every side: and his groundless and gloomy fears of it, render him inexpressibly uneasy. Such fears, are so many galling fetters to his imprisoned soul; and when he would at any time, try to shake them off, his quick sense of total inability, discourages him. From this, they take occasion to become still more oppressive to him. Hence is that mournful expression of

<sup>a</sup> Ps. liii. 5.

<sup>r</sup> Ps. xci. 10.

## 128 CONSEQUENCES OF A BELIEVER'S HAVING

Job; "If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort myself; I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent \*."

4. Great *uncertainty* of mind, about *their present*, and *their future state*, is usually a consequence of the suspension of spiritual consolation from their souls. Now that the Christian is walking in darkness, he cannot as formerly, see, either his warrant to trust as a sinner, in Christ, for salvation to himself in particular; or, any good evidence of his having ever yet trusted in him. Having lost the *light* of God's gracious countenance, and of holy comfort, he has consequently, and in the same proportion, lost *sight* of his vital union with the Saviour, and of his personal interest in His righteousness and salvation. Hence great and sad doubts, what will become of him for the future, frequently disquiet his mind. "He who walketh in this darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth †." Unbelief prevaieth so much against him, that he often questions, whether Jesus Christ can, or will, save such a great sinner as he is, and whether God will have mercy upon him, or not. He is in perplexing and painful uncertainty, what the great and terrible God may be about to do with him, when he is to depart hence; and he often suspects the worst: yea, his doubts may be suffered to prevail so much, as to make him *conclude* that, the Lord will be favourable to him no more. Thus Asaph, in a similar case, expresseth himself; "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable

\* Job. ix. 27, 28.

† John xii. 35.

no more? is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies " ?" And the Israelitish Church, in her captivity, saith, " My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord ". When the holy soul is in darkness, it will often argue thus: ' The Lord hath departed from me, and, it may be, he will never return to me. Oh! what will become of me, if I am never to enjoy communion with Him any more! What if I shall have my portion, through all eternity, with hypocrites and unbelievers, in the place of torment! I have now, no cheering light, no enlivening hope, and, perhaps, I am soon to be cast into outer darkness.' The Christian, in this perplexing condition, hath, indeed, some lucid intervals, now and then; but, as one expresses it, They are like the small breathings, and refreshments, of a person who is newly taken off the Rack, and is about to be carried to the Rack again. If it is accounted a bitter ingredient in the cup of outward affliction, to be kept in *suspense* concerning any object, which is deemed necessary and important to our *temporal* welfare; how distressing must it be to the spirit of a holy man, to be held in suspense between hope and fear, respecting objects, which are absolutely requisite, and infinitely important, to his *eternal* felicity! As a natural man cannot be at ease, without natural accommodations, or the possession of such things, as are adapted to the comfort of natural life; so, a spiritual man cannot be quieted,

" Ps. lxxvii. 7, 8, 9.

" Lam. iii. 18.



without the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. The possession of ten thousand worlds, could not afford *him* the smallest ease. Nothing, but the faith of redeeming love to him, the view of his personal interest in the Redeemer, and the hope of his eternal enjoyment of God, can put his soul to rest. Were he but to know that he is to be glorified together with Christ, and in due time to enter into His joy; he should soon come forth to the light of consolation.

5. Another consequence of their having provoked their heavenly Father, to withhold comfort from them, is, *their uttering of heartless and useless complaints.* “Even to-day,” saith Job, “is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.” And Asaph, “I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.” Some believers, after they have lost their wonted consolation, are not at first, deeply sensible of the greatness of their loss; and therefore, though they mention with sorrow their want of former comfort, yet their sorrow is far from being very deep. Their hearts are indeed, *affected* by their loss; but they are not so deeply *afflicted* by it, as bitterly to bewail the *sins* which have procured it. They fill the ears of some of their Christian friends, with lamentable accounts of their doleful condition; but at the same time, they utter almost nothing but complaints of that which they *themselves* are suffering. They do not humble themselves deeply, before the offended Majesty of heaven; nor do they, by faith, prayer, and holy circumspection, strive to recover

² Job xxii. 2.

³ Ps. lxxvii. 3.

that which they have lost. They are, like Issachar, couching down under their burdens; or, they may be compared to a diseased man, who frequently bemoans himself, but does not seek to free himself from his distemper. Sometimes, they are very peevish, and obstinate; and they seem to take a pleasure, in complaining of the trouble which they endure. But, they are not aware that, by indulging a temper of this kind, they render it necessary, that their wound should yet be deeper, and that they should yet have more reason to complain, before comfort be restored to them. David, when he was under a sense of guilt, and of paternal displeasure, doubtless, felt his loss of holy comfort; but yet, he did not strive, ingenuously to confess and bewail his iniquities, and fervently to supplicate for spiritual consolation; until, "day and night, the hand of God was so heavy upon him, that his moisture was turned into the drought of summer<sup>2</sup>." They think too, that they can never complain enough; that *their* condition is inexpressibly miserable; as that of Job, when he exclaimed, "Oh, that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up<sup>2</sup>." But such thoughts and expressions as these, are very unbecoming in the true believer; who has, in every condition, a compassionate Saviour to trust in, a consummate righteousness to rely on, and promises of grace and glory to apply and plead. The exercise of faith is certainly intermit-

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxxii. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Job vi. 2, 3.

ted, when he can allow himself, to utter such clamours. He undoubtedly, at that time, forgets the infinite freeness, suitableness, fulness, and sufficiency, of the grace which is in Christ Jesus. Besides, he thereby shews plainly, that his grief and fear are, after all, far from being great. When sorrow and fear are shallow or superficial, they are usually clamorous; but when they are great and deep, they are commonly silent: they are so great, that they cannot be expressed <sup>b</sup>; and, therefore, like the waters of a large and deep river, they move silently. So long as the dejected Christian is able to complain, methinks, instead of complaining to others around him, only of an absent God and Saviour <sup>c</sup>; he should complain of himself rather, and should complain of himself chiefly to the Lord, who only can relieve him.

6. A deep and painful *sense of God's paternal anger*, is also a consequence, and a concomitant thereof. Though believers are, in their justification, so entirely delivered from condemnation to vindictive and eternal wrath, as to be no longer exposed to wrath of *that* kind <sup>d</sup>; yet, by sinning (which after their justification they do) against the Lord, not as their avenging Judge, but as their gracious God and *Father*, they incur the guilt of *fatherly anger*. By the fatherly anger of God, is meant, his holy and righteous displeasure with his disobedient children, which is manifested by his infliction of chastisement upon them. In this manner, the Lord was angry with Moses <sup>e</sup>, and with

<sup>b</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 4.

<sup>d</sup> Isa. liv. 9.

<sup>c</sup> Lam. iii. 39.

<sup>e</sup> Deut. i. 37.

his ancient Church, the members of which, expostulate with him thus: "O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?" When the Lord is so displeased with any of his children, as to withdraw from them, the sense of his special favour, he commonly, at the same time, impresseth on their souls in place of it, a sense of his paternal anger. Instead of cheering them, with that delightful sense of his redeeming love to them, which they formerly enjoyed; he fixeth deep in their souls, a painful feeling of his being angry with them. "For the iniquity of his covetousness," saith Jehovah, "was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth." When the Lord is wroth with any of his people for their iniquities, he will not only hide his face from them, or deprive them of the cheering sense of his favour; but he will smite them likewise: and this he will do, not only by some external stroke of his rod, on their bodies or estates; but, sometimes, by an *internal* and deep impression of his anger, on their souls. And, if depriving them of the cheering sense of God's favour, is connected with the feeling of his hot displeasure, an inexpressibly bitter and grievous conflict in their souls, must ensue. Therefore hath the Lord said, "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." When God is wroth with his children, he makes them *feel* his displeasure; either, by frowning so upon them, that they shall for a sea-

<sup>f</sup> Ps. lxxiv. 1.

<sup>g</sup> Isa. lvii. 17.

<sup>h</sup> Isa. lvii. 16.

### 134 CONSEQUENCES OF A BELIEVER'S HAVING

son, discern almost nothing in his countenance, but a continued, and a dreadful frown; or, by "covering them with a cloud in his anger <sup>1</sup>;" or, by seeming "to be angry even with their prayer <sup>k</sup>," to shut it out <sup>l</sup>, and to "cover himself with a cloud, that it cannot pass through <sup>m</sup>;" or, by leaving their souls to languish, under the prevalence of unbelief, discouragement, and dread; or, by laying sore and long affliction, upon their bodies, and rendering all the means, which they employ for the removal of it, unavailing; or, in a word, by threatening to destroy at once, all their external comforts. Indeed, when the Lord impresseth on their spirits, a deep and fixed sense of his anger, no creature can afford to them the smallest consolation. In vain, will they seek for ease to their oppressed souls, in business, or amusements, or gay company. Friends may, indeed, mourn with them; but, as one expresses it, 'they cannot wipe away *their* tears.'—Nor can they, then, find relief, even in the ordinances of God. Every threatening of his holy law, appears as an arrow aimed at their heart. Every promise of his blessed gospel, however full of consolation to others, seems empty to them. Every offer of a Saviour, and of his great salvation, however unlimited, appears to be directed to other sinners, and not to them. The Lord himself seemeth to them, as if he were taking no notice of their distress, yea, as if he were an enemy to their souls. We are not to wonder then, if, in such a case, they feel overwhelming trouble and anguish of spirit <sup>n</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Lam. ii. 1.

<sup>k</sup> Ps lxxx. 4.

<sup>l</sup> Lam. ii. 8.

<sup>m</sup> Lam. iii. 44.

<sup>n</sup> Job xx. 6, 8. Eccl. xxxviii. 2, 3.

Indeed, it is because the Lord still loveth them, and resolveth to save them; that, when he sees them running on to sin and misery, his paternal anger thus overtakes them, in order to stop, and bring them back again, to the comfort of holy conformity to the image of his Son Jesus Christ.

7. *A most distressing sense even of the vindictive wrath of God*, is, sometimes, a consequence of their loss of comfort. True believers indeed, can never be cast into hell; but the Lord may, as it were, cast hell into them. Some of them, accordingly, when God hath hid his face from them, have been permitted, rashly and falsely to conclude that, because they cannot see him now, they never saw him; that, because they cannot perceive their evidences of grace now, they never had true grace; that, as they never had true grace formerly, they have no saving grace now; and that, the anger of God which they now feel, is not his fatherly displeasure, but his *vindictive* wrath<sup>o</sup>. Thus they unjustly, as well as rashly, conclude that what they now feel, is an impression of revenging wrath. It is of this wrath, that Heman seems to complain, when he saith, “Thy wrath lieth hard upon me: Thy fierce wrath goeth over me<sup>p</sup>.” In like manner, one of the prophets saith, “I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping; because of thine indignation, and thy wrath<sup>q</sup>.” The sense of vindictive wrath, is much more doleful, and intolerable, than even that of paternal anger: and therefore the Psalmist prays that, if he

<sup>o</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 14.

<sup>p</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 7, 16.

<sup>q</sup> Ps. cii. 9, 10.

must be chastened, that greatest of all chastisements, may not be inflicted upon him : " O Lord, rebuke me not in thy *wrath*; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure<sup>1</sup>." He prayeth not merely, that the Lord may not punish him in vindictive wrath ; but, that he may not so chasten him, as to lay him under an overwhelming *impression* of that intolerable wrath.

When the soul of a holy man is, for a season, under that direful impression, he can see nothing, feel nothing, but consuming wrath. Conscious as he is, that he deserveth the fierceness of eternal wrath, he is filled with dreadful apprehensions, that the hand which presseth him sore, is the hand, not of a merciful Father, but of an avenging Judge ; casting him down, as a condemned criminal, into a deep and horrible dungeon. Heman, under a sense of that wrath, complains to the Lord thus ; " Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps<sup>2</sup>." When a saint is under terrible impressions of Jehovah's infinite wrath, he cannot but be under great horror of conscience, and in perplexing depths of mental trouble. The sense which he hath of avenging wrath, occasions a conflict in his spirit, inexpressibly agonizing and terrible. When his troubled conscience is inflamed, by a sense of the fiery indignation of God almighty, the more he thinks of Him as his infinite enemy, the more he is dismayed<sup>3</sup> : every thought of *him*, brings doleful tidings, and pours oil upon the raging flame. Trouble of conscience for sin, is indeed very disquieting ; but, a sense of the vin-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxviii. 1.    <sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 6.    <sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 3.

dictive wrath of God, kindled in the conscience, is still more dreadful. No words can express the direful anguish, which the disconsolate soul then feels<sup>u</sup>. The Christian cannot at that time, think so much as one quieting, one cheering thought. What he first thinks of, is tormenting to his wounded spirit: he changes that thought for another, and that is still more tormenting. He finds himself entangled, as in the midst of a thicket of thorns; so that, which way soever he turns himself, he is pierced and grieved afresh. This dismal thought often arises in his troubled mind; That if death were, in his present condition, to surprise and cut him off, he should sink for ever and ever, under the intolerable wrath of the infinite Jehovah. The most exquisite torment of body is almost nothing, in comparison of the anguish of his spirit, at such times<sup>w</sup>. Oh! how inconceivable is the anguish, the agony, especially of a holy soul, when it is conflicting with the tremendous wrath of the eternal God! The bodily torture even of crucifixion, could not extort from the holy Jesus, the smallest sigh or complaint; but the sense of his Father's wrath in his soul, wrung from him that doleful outcry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me<sup>x</sup>?"

8. Another consequence of their having deprived themselves of spiritual comfort, is *overwhelming terror*. Terror is an excessive fear and trembling of heart<sup>y</sup>. The troubled soul begins to dread, that its present feeling of vindictive wrath, is but the

<sup>u</sup> Ps. cxvi. 3.    <sup>w</sup> Prov. xviii. 14.    <sup>x</sup> Mat. xxvii. 46.  
<sup>y</sup> Gen. xv. 12. Acts ix. 6.



beginning of what it shall have to feel, through an endless eternity. "The terrors of God," saith Job, "do set themselves in array against me<sup>2</sup>." "Destruction from God was a terror to me<sup>3</sup>." And Heman, "While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me, thy terrors have cut me off<sup>b</sup>." The Lord permitteth some of his children, when they are under the hidings of his face, not only, to draw from that awful dispensation, false conclusions, with regard to their past and present state; but, to form rash and despondent conclusions, concerning their future condition. They then conclude that, it will never be better with them, as to their outward afflictions. Hezekiah, in a similar case, said, "I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world<sup>c</sup>." They likewise conclude that, it will never be better with them in this world, with respect to their inward troubles. "I shall go softly all my years," said Hezekiah, "in the bitterness of my soul<sup>d</sup>." Nay, under the prevalence of unbelief, and of despondency, they peremptorily conclude that, the Lord whom they have greatly displeased, will cast them off, and punish them with everlasting destruction in the world to come. They do not merely question, as Asaph did, if the Lord will be favourable to them any more; but they rashly and positively conclude, that he never will. They say, as the house of Israel did, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut

<sup>2</sup> Job vi. 4.    <sup>3</sup> Job xxxi. 23.    <sup>b</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 15, 16.

<sup>c</sup> Isa. xxxviii. 11.    <sup>d</sup> Isa. xxxviii. 15.

off for our parts <sup>e</sup>:" and as the Israelitish Church did, "My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord <sup>f</sup>." This they do, not during a short fit of despondency, or in their haste, as David; but, for a long time. "When neither sun nor stars" of consolation, "in many days, appear, all hope that they shall be saved, seemeth to be taken away." Those awful passages of Scripture, in which "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness," do continually present themselves to their view: and by a strange kind of belief, they apprehend that even every part of the word, as well as every dispensation of the providence, of God, is the sword of an enemy; that promises, as well as threatenings; that mercies, as well as judgments, are against them; and that by all, the Lord, as with a flaming sword turning every way, doth hinder their access to the tree of life. Terrors, like fire, assimilate every thing to their own nature; and so they render dejected souls unable, to put a just, or a favourable construction, upon any of the words, or dispensations of the Lord.

The terrors of God may indeed be felt, but they cannot be expressed. They are inconceivably dreadful and overwhelming. They are "the arrows of the Almighty, within a man, the poison whereof, drinketh up his spirit <sup>g</sup>;" wounding him in the most vital and tender part, they cause his spirit within him to pine away, and almost to die. 'I shall doubtless perish,' saith the affrighted soul.

<sup>e</sup> Ezek. xxxvii. 11.

<sup>f</sup> Lam. iii. 18.

<sup>g</sup> Job vi. 4.

‘ I am undone, for ever undone ; I am already, as it were, in the place of torment, under inexpressible anguish, insupportable terror. The great and terrible God hath cast me off ; and I see nothing before me, but horrible darkness, blackness of darkness for ever. The shadows of the evening, are stretched out over me ; and what will become of me, if it shall prove an endless night ! Oh ! what will my eternal state be, should death surprise me in my present condition ! If I cannot now bear even a slight impression of the anger of God ; how shall I be able to endure the full weight, the eternal fierceness, of his avenging wrath ! If I am so troubled, so terrified, so amazed, now ; what shall I do, when my tremendous doom shall be pronounced, and the endless execution of it begun !’ Oh ! what overwhelming horror, what direful agony, must an awakened and disconsolate soul feel, in the awful prospect of suffering the vengeance of eternal fire ! Oh ! eternity, eternity, how, in the night of terror, doth the prospect of eternity, amaze and even absorb the spirit !

9. Satan’s being permitted *to add to the trouble and terror* of believers, is usually a consequence of their having forfeited their spiritual comfort. In that condition, they are commonly “in heaviness through manifold temptations<sup>h</sup>.” When the Lord is chastening any of his children, for being more ready to believe the lies of Satan, than the truths of His holy word ; he often permitteth that crafty and cruel enemy, to hold them down, and to terrify them. And so far as he is permitted, his constant

<sup>h</sup> 1 Pet. i. 6.

work is, to render them as uncomfortable in their way to heaven, as possible. Thus he treated Job. The spiritual trouble, and the dismal terror of that holy man, were, for the most part, from the immediate hand of Satan. When this enemy of souls perceives, that believers constantly resist his temptations to presumption, he assaults them with furious, and horrible temptations to despair. And when he observes any of them under a sense of Divine anger, and a dread of eternal wrath, he commonly selects this as the fittest opportunity, to enforce those temptations. He then, especially, labours to persuade them that, when God is afflicting them with such great severity, it is a sure evidence that, he is not their God, but their adversary, and that, they are not his people, but his enemies. He misrepresents both God and themselves to them, and so insults them in their misery. When that cowardly enemy perceives, that their spirit is already broken down, he makes his most furious assaults on them ; for he knows that when they are once cast down, he can the more easily trample on, and afflict them. No sooner doth the Lord depart, than Satan comes: he comes to triumph over their anguish, and to say, ‘ Where now is your God? Remember that, your iniquities have been peculiarly great and aggravated, and that, ye have thereby provoked the Lord finally to abandon you : ye do already feel his fiery indignation, and you have reason, good reason, to dread that you shall endure it for ever.’ He takes occasion from their anguish of spirit, to represent the Lord to them, as a cruel tyrant, as one who hath resolved to destroy them. And when they already fear, and even feel, that God hath

departed from them, what can they say in answer to him? Perceiving their distress, and knowing their weakness, he, with amazing dexterity, and unwearied importunity, urges against them, even passages of Scripture, and dispensations of providence, in order to enforce his infernal suggestions. When he sees that their faith is very weak, and that their sense of Divine displeasure is very deep; he then shoots his fiery darts, which penetrate and inflame their souls, with additional anguish and horror<sup>i</sup>. It is a pleasant sight to that wicked one, to behold God afflicting his children; and to see, were it but one of them, wounded with griefs, broken with terrors, made, “a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls<sup>k</sup>.” He, therefore, after they have been long disquieted, and enfeebled by desponding fears, assaults them furiously; in order that, when they are already pressed down, he may throw upon them additional weight.

It is his usual method, so to impress terror on their minds, that it frequently comes upon them by sudden fits. These fits or paroxysms commonly return, whenever the troubled soul would promise itself some degree of ease. Accordingly, the usual time of refreshing the body with food and sleep, are for ordinary, the seasons which Satan watches, for his renewed assaults<sup>l</sup>. He commonly injects, at such times, blasphemous and atheistical thoughts, which fill them with horror; and when he has thereby prepared their hearts, he seizes the opportunity to persuade them, that such a

<sup>i</sup> Eph. vi. 16.<sup>k</sup> Job xxx. 29.<sup>l</sup> Job. iii. 24. and vii. 13, 14.

heart, must be wholly destitute of regenerating grace. And when he perceives, that any of them are afflicted with melancholy, he considers that, as a distemper which affords him advantages, peculiarly suited to his design: the imagination is then disordered, and so is fitter than at any other time, to receive impressions from him. It also affords him much advantage, if they have lately fallen into some great and grievous sins; especially, as one observes<sup>m</sup>, into sins against the third, or sixth, or seventh commandment. Arguing from such crimes, he labours to persuade them, that they are reprobated, and doomed to eternal destruction. When he perceives, that they have been guilty of some atrocious iniquity, he will suggest, that it is even the unpardonable sin. He argues likewise from their perturbation of spirit, that their heart is so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, as to be utterly incapable of exercising repentance unto life. The more he distracts and amazes their minds with terrors, the more unable they are, to detect the fallacy of his arguments, and the more disposed they are, to admit the force of them. Excessive fear, removes their souls to such a distance from true comfort, that they will not be persuaded to trust in the Lord Jesus, either for his salvation, or for the joy of that salvation. Under such perplexing fears, they seem disposed so far to take part with Satan, as, with much eagerness, and wonderful subtilty, to plead against themselves. Believer, when thy transgressions are, at any time, so exceedingly aggravated in thy view, as to ex-

<sup>m</sup> Mr William Perkins.

ceed, either the mercy of God, or the blood of his Son, or the power of his Spirit, or the grace of his covenant ; thou mayest be sure that, it is one of the lies of the devil. Oh ! be henceforth so wise for thyself, as no longer to expect truth from a liar, or sound argument from a deceiver, or true comfort from an enemy.

10. To be *discountenanced* or *coldly treated by Christian friends*, is often a consequence of a believer's having forfeited his spiritual comfort. When the Lord is angry with his rebellious child, and is chastening him ; he not only giveth Satan leave to trouble him, but permitteth some of the saints who are acquainted with him, to discountenance him, and by their cold treatment of him, to add to his grief. When the Father of a family resolves, the more effectually, to correct his obstinate child, he will say to the rest of his household, ‘ Do not be familiar with him ; shew him no countenance ; put him to shame.’ In like manner, when the Lord is smiting, especially with spiritual trouble, his disobedient child, he, as it were, saith to others of his children, ‘ Have for a season no familiarity with him : treat him with coldness and neglect ; in order that he may be ashamed, and humbled for his iniquity.’ Job, under his grievous affliction, complained thus, “ He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are utterly estranged from me, &c<sup>n</sup>.” And likewise Heman, “ Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me ; thou hast made me an abomination unto them. Lover and friend, hast thou put far from me, and

▪ Job xix. 13—19.

mine acquaintance into darkness °." When the favour of God to the soul is clouded, the comfort of Christian society is also obscured. When He frowns on one, his children commonly appear to frown likewise; and when he makes himself strange to one, so for the most part do they. If a holy man, then, under trouble of spirit, begins to be treated with disregard, and even with contempt, by some of his Christian brethren, he ought not to be surprised; neither should he take occasion to be angry, or to quarrel with them; but he should look above them, and take the afflictive dispensation, only out of the hand of the Lord, as a necessary part of the chastisement intended for him. He ought to say with respect to them, as David said concerning Shimei, "The Lord hath bidden them;" or, as Heman did, "Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me."

11. *Hard thoughts of God, and jealous thoughts of Christ*, do often take occasion to arise from the want of comfort, especially, if believers have remained long in that condition.

*Hard thoughts of God*, proceed from their disconsolate hearts; such as, That he is so greatly incensed against them, as to be implacable; that he hath so forsaken them, as never any more to return; that he hath passed such a sentence of condemnation upon them, as shall never be reversed; that he hath covered himself with such a cloud in his anger, as shall henceforth render it impossible for their prayer, to pass through; that he hath forgotten to be gracious to them; that his mercy

° Ps. lxxxviii. 8, 18.



is clean gone for ever, and such like. When dejection and terror continue long, they obscure the mind, and cause it to form and entertain gloomy, yea, monstrous apprehensions. Hence are these words of Job ; “ He performeth the thing that is appointed for me ; and many such things are with him. Therefore am I troubled at his presence : when I consider, I am afraid of him. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me ; because I was not cut off before the darkness <sup>P</sup>.”

*Jealous thoughts of Christ*, the glorious head and husband of believing souls, do likewise arise from the disconsolate heart. If souls have hard thoughts of God, they will quickly entertain jealous thoughts of Christ Jesus. And if they but begin to suspect, that Christ doth not love them, or that he is not faithful in performing his promises to them ; they will be afraid to take his word, and afraid to trust him, or to commit themselves and their salvation to him. Christian, be continually on thy guard, against unbelieving and suspicious thoughts of the love of Christ, to thy soul. Trust firmly that he loveth thee, and careth for thee, and that he will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. Thy sensible comfort may leave thee ; but thy faithful Redeemer, the husband of thy soul, will never totally or finally forsake thee. He may indeed for a season, “ cause grief ; but he will have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies <sup>Q</sup>.” Say not then, when he hideth his face from thee, “ He hath utterly forsaken me ;” but rather, in the

<sup>P</sup> Job xxiii. 14—17.

<sup>Q</sup> Lam. iii. 32.

exercise of unsuspecting confidence in him and in his love to thee, say, "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon me; he will subdue my iniquities, and will cast all my sins, into the depths of the sea<sup>r</sup>." O guard against jealous thoughts of thy infinitely faithful Redeemer. Do not suspect him without ground. The moment, thou art jealous of his love to thee, thou sinnest against him without a cause. The Lord Jesus at no time, so conducts himself, in his ways of grace and providence toward thee, as to give thee the smallest cause to suspect his faithfulness<sup>s</sup>. And if thou wouldst never suspect his kindness and faithfulness to thy soul, till thou had a cause, it is all that he would desire. Remember that, to be jealous of the holy Jesus, is to sin, not only against Him, but against thyself. "Jealousy is the rage of a man<sup>t</sup>;" and "it is cruel, or, hard as the grave<sup>u</sup>." It will disquiet and torture thy soul; it will waste thy spirits, and prey upon thee, like the grave. Thou, indeed, hast been unfaithful, very unfaithful to the Lord Jesus; but this, though a ground of deep humiliation, yet is no ground at all, for suspecting *his* faithfulness to his own promise, upon which he hath caused thee to hope<sup>w</sup>.

12. Another consequence of their loss of spiritual consolation, is, their being usually so discomposed and dispirited thereby, as to become at the time, *unfit for the spiritual performance of their duty*. This will more especially be the case with them, if, as is too common, they, in their disconsolate con-

<sup>r</sup> Mic. vii. 19.

<sup>u</sup> Song viii. 6.

<sup>s</sup> Lam. iii. 23.

<sup>w</sup> Ps. cxix. 49.

<sup>t</sup> Prov. vi. 34.

dition, forbear to trust in the Saviour for present and eternal salvation. Though their obedience is not accepted, on account of their faith; yet, it is spiritually good and acceptable, in proportion to the strength, and the frequency, of their actings of faith. If then, they cease for a season, to act faith, they, in the same proportion, cease for that time, to perform spiritual and acceptable obedience to the Lord; for "without faith, it is impossible to please him <sup>x</sup>." It is not sufficient, in order to acceptable obedience, that Christians have faith in principle, and even in habit: they must likewise have it in exercise; and that, even when they walk in darkness, and have no light of sensible comfort <sup>y</sup>. But if, in the darkness of spiritual trouble, they forbear for a season, to trust in the Lord Jesus, for complete salvation to themselves in particular; that trouble will so disquiet and dispirit them, as to disqualify them, either for doing or for suffering, according to the will of God. "I am," saith Herman, "as a man that hath no strength <sup>z</sup>." Nay, it hath made some of them even think that, it is to no purpose for *them*, to endeavour spiritually to perform any duty. Indeed their souls, when in that doleful condition, are commonly so much occupied with the fear of eternal wrath, that sin *as* sin, and duty *as* duty, are but little considered by them. Moreover, that conscience by which, they judge themselves to be still under the guilt of all their sins, is in the Scripture called "an *evil conscience* <sup>a</sup>;" a conscience which, the blood of Christ

<sup>x</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

<sup>y</sup> Isa. l. 10.

<sup>z</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 4.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. x. 22.

must purge from dead works, in order to their being capacitated to serve the living God <sup>b</sup>. Love; which is the fulfilling of the law, and the end of the commandment, must arise out of a *good* conscience, as well as out of a pure heart <sup>c</sup>. That evil or guilty conscience, by which disquieted Christians judge that the Lord is still their enemy, because of their sins; doth greatly strengthen the remaining enmity of their hearts, against Him; and so it indisposes them, for affectionate and filial obedience to him. For, in proportion as they decline in their love to him, they are hardly drawn to him in any spiritual service, and easily drawn from him: they come slowly, and depart readily; they approach with reluctance; and while they stand before him, it is with hesitation and dislike.

Besides, as spiritual joy raises and invigorates the spirit; so carnal and legal sorrow depresses and enfeebles it. All sorrow, except godly sorrow, lies like lead on the heart, cold and heavy, and presses it still downward. It likewise makes the soul contract itself, or shrink from that spiritual intercourse with God in Christ, which it ought, eagerly and incessantly to pursue. Under the pressure of sadness, especially when it is accompanied with terror, believers themselves find no heart to pray, and no life in praying. They bow their knees; they sigh and cry; but the Lord seemeth not to regard them, nor to return answers of peace to their prayers. Their thoughts are, for the most part, in a continual tumult; and so, in all their efforts to pray, wandering and perplex-

<sup>b</sup> Heb. ix. 14.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5.

ing thoughts do sadly prevail against them. Their sadness greatly abates their vigour of spirit, and destroys their freedom of speech : It dampeth also their faith, and hope, and love ; and so, it mars their prayers, as well as all their other spiritual exercises. Finding that, they are still as perplexed, and as disconsolate, after prayer, as before it, and fearing that, their prayer is an abomination to the Lord ; they are almost at the point of giving it over. They are troubled, when they do not pray ; and when they would pray, they find that they cannot. Sometimes, when the trouble of their mind, becomes great and violent, it suppresses their words, and can itself find no vent. “ I am so troubled,” says Asaph, “ that I cannot speak <sup>d</sup>.” The waters of their trouble and anguish, do so drown their cries, that they either cannot pray at all, or can find no liberty, no pleasure, no relief, in their prayers.

13. Lastly, The joint effect of those consequences above mentioned, frequently is, that *the natural spirits begin to be disordered and dejected*. Trouble of mind, especially when it is great, or of long continuance, commonly produces this effect. Such is the nature of the union, between the soul and the body, that there is almost never, any vigorous exercise of any of the affections or passions of the soul, without some corresponding effect thereby produced on the motion of the fluids, and especially, of the natural spirits of the body. The motion of the animal spirits, is thereby altered ; whence often arises some bodily sensation, especially about

<sup>d</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 4.

the heart, and other parts essential to life, which are the fountains of those fluids. So much, is the body subjected to the soul, and so much, do the spirits of the body, depend on the affections of the soul; that the exercise of any one of the affections, has a direct tendency to produce some sensible effect on the body: and if the exercise of any one of them, be great or violent, it will produce an effect, proportionably great and violent. Accordingly, the holy Psalmist, expressing his vehement desire of communion with God in public ordinances, says, “ My soul thirsteth for thee, my *flesh* longeth for thee <sup>e</sup>.” And again, “ My heart and my *flesh* cry out for the living God <sup>f</sup>.” Now, the affections of grief and fear do, in proportion to the degree of their exercise, contract the natural spirits, and render their motions feeble and slow. The consequence is, that the vigour of the body commonly declines: its motions become sluggish. The lamp of life burns dimly. The countenance grows dejected; the complexion waxes pale; and no liveliness, nor activity, seems to remain. Hence are these complaints in Scripture; “ On my eye-lids is the shadow of death <sup>g</sup>.” “ I am become like dust and ashes <sup>h</sup>.” “ My moisture is turned into the drought of summer <sup>i</sup>.” “ There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger <sup>k</sup>.” “ I am become like a bottle in the smoke <sup>l</sup>.” “ My soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto the grave <sup>m</sup>.” As

<sup>e</sup> Ps. lxiii. 1.

<sup>f</sup> Ps. lxxxiv. 2.

<sup>g</sup> Job xvi. 16.

<sup>h</sup> Job xxx. 19.

<sup>i</sup> Ps. xxxii. 4.

<sup>k</sup> Ps. xxxviii. 3.

<sup>l</sup> Ps. cxix. 83.

<sup>m</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 3.

the motion of the spirits of the body, is retarded and altered, by the influence of the grief and fear of the soul; so this alteration, especially if it continue for a considerable time, will at length, produce that disorder which is called *melancholy*. Though melancholy, which is indeed a distemper of the body, is totally distinct from trouble of mind, strictly so called; yet the former often proceeds from, and is increased by the latter; and the latter again, is reciprocally augmented, and often prolonged by the former. For, as the soul cannot but feel with the body, in its pain; so the body cannot be exempted from sharing with the soul, in its trouble.

HAVING now considered the leading consequences of the loss of spiritual comfort, it will be proper to observe, in order to prevent mistakes, that, in the case of some disconsolate Christians, all these consequences concur; but, in that of others, only some of them take place. It is seldom, except when spiritual distress becomes very deep, and continues long, that they are all felt by one and the same believer. Spiritual trouble usually consists either, in the loss of comfort, together with all those consequences of it; or, in the want of comfort, with some of them only, and that in a greater or less degree. Accordingly it is either total or partial. Some believers have been afflicted with *total* distress of soul, so that they have, in a certain degree, even despaired of mercy. It possibly may to some, appear harsh, to charge so horrible a sin as despair, upon true believers, even in their deepest perturbation of spirit. But, if it seem uncharitable to say,

that any of the saints, ever fall into a degree of despair ; it will, surely, be more harsh and uncharitable to affirm, that none who ever do fall into despair, are saints. Indeed it cannot be denied, that some of the saints, under the deepest anguish of spirit, have for a time so despaired, as to have been overwhelmed with terror, in the dreadful prospect of eternal wrath. Other believers again, upon their loss of comfort, are afflicted only with *partial* trouble of mind, and are soon delivered from it. They have, indeed, painful experience of some, or even of the most of those consequences above mentioned, but not of all. They have, it may be, a painful sense of paternal anger ; but, being enabled still to trust, that the hand which afflicteth *their* souls, is the hand of a Father, and not of an enemy, they are exempted from an overwhelming sense of avenging wrath : or they may, perhaps, have some feeling even of vindictive wrath ; and yet, be under but a very small degree of despondency<sup>a</sup>. Those of the saints, who have even all those doleful consequences, of their having forfeited their holy consolation, may have them in a greater or less degree ; and those who have only some of them, may likewise have these in various degrees. Trouble of mind in some believers, is transient and short ; in others, is fixed, of long continuance, and sometimes, attended with very alarming symptoms. But still, however short, and however low in degree, it be ; the very lowest degree of it, is inconceivably more intolerable and dreadful, than the highest degree of bodily affliction.

<sup>a</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 1.



## 154 CONSEQUENCES OF A BELIEVER'S HAVING

Now from the foregoing detail, the following remarks are obvious :

First, Trouble of mind, especially when it is excessive, is *not in itself good, but evil*. It is sinful in true Christians, to suffer themselves to be disquieted by, and to languish under, despondent fears, as if they had not a compassionate Saviour, to trust in. Deep dejection of Spirit, produces much aversion of heart, from the spiritual performance of every duty. It is contrary to the great duty of believing. Faith is a resting ; this trouble is a disquietment, of the heart : faith is the eye of the soul ; such trouble, is the blindness and darkness of the soul : faith giveth glory to God ; this reflects dishonour upon him. It is not only a sin, but a most heinous sin, to yield so to dejection of spirit, as to refuse to be comforted. The troubled spirit of the Christian, actually rises against redeeming grace. It is well for him in such a case, that the covenant of grace, in which he is still instated, is well "ordered in all things;" that it stands, like a well-marshalled army on the field, ready to resist his attacks, upon whatever part of it, he may choose to fall. Be deeply convinced, O disquieted believer, that thy refusing to trust in the Saviour and to be comforted, is thy *aggravated sin* ; and that it is inexpressibly dangerous, as well as sinful, to allow despondency and trouble to grow upon thy spirit.

Next, The most tender *compassion* from all, and especially from fellow-Christians, is due to them who are under trouble of spirit. Such distress cries aloud for the tenderest sympathy. If it is a great sin, to treat with roughness or severity,

**fellow-creatures, who are under exquisite pain of body; it is a much more heinous iniquity, so to treat fellow-Christians, who are under anguish of soul<sup>o</sup>.**

Again, It is the duty of the disconsolate believer, *to hope*, that he shall in due time, be delivered from his trouble. “It is good that he should both hope, and quietly wait for the Salvation of the Lord; for the Lord will not cast off for ever<sup>p</sup>.” On these words of the Lord Jesus, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered,” Austin, puts to a believer, this pertinent question; “Thou, who canst not lose a single hair, how comes it to pass, that thou art afraid of losing thy soul?” Christian, cheer thy troubled spirit with the hope, that thy compassionate Saviour will deliver thee, though thou canst not tell how, nor when<sup>q</sup>. Let the consideration of his infinite mercy, and of his near relation to thee, encourage thee, in expectation of deliverance, to bear with patience thy grievous trial<sup>r</sup>. Consider what thou hast deserved at the hand of the Lord, and that, impatience will but provoke him, to set yet a keener edge on thy trouble. Thou hast need of patience. “Let patience therefore have her perfect work<sup>s</sup>.”

Moreover, It appears evident, that it is also the duty of the disconsolate Christian, *never to give way to carnal reasoning against himself*. When his faith is lively, and his evidences are clear; he can refute carnal reasoning, and say with the apostle Paul, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of

<sup>o</sup> Obad. ver. 12. Gal. vi. 2.      <sup>p</sup> Lam. iii. 26, 31.

<sup>q</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 19. <sup>r</sup> Mic. vii. 9. James v. 11. <sup>s</sup> James i. 4.

God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, &c '." But when his faith is languid, and his evidences are eclipsed; it is not only useless, but dangerous in the extreme, to yield to carnal reasoning about the state of his soul: for then, he is least qualified to take God's part, against the cavils of Satan, and of an evil heart of unbelief. Were a man, in order to try and confirm the validity of his title to an estate, to encourage a suit to commence against himself; he surely would not choose, for that purpose, the time in which, he could not find his evidences of that title. Alas! the time which a good man chooses, for giving ear to carnal reasoning, is commonly the very time in which, he hath lost his evidences of grace. And it is grievous to see, with what a weak piece of sophistry, the devil will baffle him, at such a time. It is inexpressibly dangerous for a child of light, especially when he is in the dark, to be *reasoning* with the prince of darkness: he cannot, in such circumstances, be safe, otherwise than by the resolute exercise of prayer, and of that faith, which is above sight, as well as contrary to sense and carnal reason. He should not spend a moment, in framing arguments against himself. Satan will be ready enough to suggest them. And in particular, he ought never to conclude that he is a hypocrite, from such things, as are no where in the Scripture, declared to be marks of *reigning* hypocrisy. Where, O disconsolate Christain, dost thou read, in the Oracles of truth, That the want

' Rom. viii. 33, 34.

of legal terrors in conversion ; or, that wandering thoughts, straitness, dulness, and deadness of spirit, in prayer, while thou bewailest them, and strivest against them ; or, that the want of present evidences of sincerity, and of those degrees of peace and joy, to which some have attained ; or, that some iniquity, for a time, prevailing against thee, notwithstanding thy frequent efforts to resist it ;—where, I say, dost thou read that any of these, is an evidence of reigning hypocrisy ? Or, where canst thou find, that the presence of hypocrisy in the heart, is the same as the predominance of it ?

It is no less the duty of the disquieted believer, *to distinguish well*, between the atheistical and blasphemous thoughts, which are injected by Satan ; and those, which proceed from his own heart. His doing so, will through grace, be a mean of lessening, in no small degree, the anguish of his soul. Atheistical and blasphemous thoughts do sometimes proceed from his own heart : for our blessed Lord saith, “ Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts... blasphemies <sup>u</sup>.” And he may charge himself with such thoughts, as having arisen from his own heart ; when, instead of resisting them instantly, and with abhorrence, he for a little, yields to them. But if, as is more frequently the case, they come in suddenly and violently upon his mind ; if his heart trembles at them, and with holy abhorrence, instantly opposes them <sup>w</sup> ; and, if his being assaulted with them, is very grievous to him <sup>x</sup> ; he ought without hesitation, to charge them upon Satan,

<sup>u</sup> Matth. xv. 19.

<sup>w</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 15.

<sup>x</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 21, 22.

and not upon himself. He should, for his comfort, never impute them to himself, as *his* transgressions, but to the tempter, as *his*.

It is likewise his duty to read *diligently, and frequently*, such passages of Scripture, as are most suited to comfort him. It is not less true than strange, that the believer, under mental trouble, is usually much disposed to read, to remember, and to apply to himself, such passages of Scripture, and of human writings, as are most adapted to *increase* the trouble and terror of his soul. Such places of Scripture, and of other books, as are arousing and alarming, are indeed very proper for a good man, often to read and remember, when he finds that carnal security is prevailing against him. But when his soul, is already depressed with terror and dismay, so that, he needs cordials to refresh his drooping spirit; he ought, chiefly and frequently to read, meditate, and believe with application to himself, such passages of Scripture, as are most encouraging and consoling to his fainting soul; especially these referred to at the bottom of this page<sup>7</sup>. Let him resolve firmly, in dependance on promised grace, and in defiance of his disinclination, to read again and again, those and similar passages, to believe them with regard to himself, and to convert them into matter of ejaculatory prayer.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. xliii. 5. and lxxi. 20—23. Isa. i. 18. and iv. 1—4. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Hos. xiv. 4—6. Isa. lvii 15. —19. and lxvi. 13. and xl. 27—31. Isa. xlix. 8—16. and liv. 7—14. and lxi. 1—3. Isa. xli. 10—14. and xliii. 1, 2. Lam. iii. 22—26. Matth. xi. 28, 29. Rev. xii. 17. John iii. 14—17. John xiv. 15—27. 1 Tim. 15. Matth. ix. 13. Ps. cxxxviii. 3—8.

As the dejected believer, is chastened less than he deserves to be, and as it is of the Lord's mercies, that he is not even consumed ; let him *readily acknowledge this*, and see that he express his grateful sense of it, by *glorifying the Lord* even in the fires<sup>2</sup>. Let him endeavour to glorify the Lord, by being constantly upon his guard, against all manner of sin, and especially, against omitting any known duty. He must never take occasion from the uneasiness of his mind, to neglect a single duty, that it is possible for him to perform. It is inexpressibly dangerous for the Christian to be indolent at any time ; but especially, when he is under depression of spirit.

To conclude: Doth God afflict some even of his own dear saints, with unutterable anguish and terror of soul, when he is only chastening them for iniquity ? What *exquisite torment then, what direful anguish*, awaits impenitent sinners, in the place of torment, where they must lie, throughout eternity, under his vindictive, his infinite, his tremendous wrath ! Christ hath given infinite satisfaction to the offended justice of God, for all the iniquities of his children. They love God supremely : they also love his commandments, and study to keep them. They are the objects of his redeeming, of his immense, of his everlasting love ; and yet, in chastening them for their iniquity, he, sometimes, afflicteth them with dreadful impressions of his displeasure. Now, if a sense only of his *fatherly* anger, is so terrible, and intolerable, to them ; how wilt thou, O impenitent and careless sinner, be able

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xxiv. 15.

## 160 CONSEQUENCES OF A BELIEVER'S, &c.

to endure the fierceness of his *vindictive* wrath, the heat of his fiery indignation, “ which shall burn unto the lowest hell ?” If the suffering of that, only for a short season, for a small moment, is so inexpressibly painful to them ; Oh ! what direful agony, what overwhelming anguish, must thou endure, when thou shalt suffer this, not for millions of ages merely, but through all the endless ages of eternity ! Ah ! secure sinner, if thou do not flee speedily from the wrath to come, to the great Redeemer, offered to thee in the gospel ; “ the smoke of thy torment, will ascend up for ever and ever ; and thou shalt have no rest, day nor night.” We are informed by Him who cannot lie, “ That the wicked shall be turned into hell<sup>a</sup> ;” “ that they shall go away into everlasting punishment<sup>b</sup> ;” and, “ that they shall be cast into a furnace of fire, of everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels<sup>c</sup>.” Consider this, thou who livest in sin, and be afraid. Oh ! do not continue any longer, in the love and practice of iniquity. Do not, for the momentary and polluted pleasures of sin, persist in exposing thyself to endless wrath. Walk while thou hast the light, lest darkness come upon thee. While thou hast light, believe in the light, that thou mayest be one of the children of light<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Ps. ix. 17.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. xxv. 46.

<sup>c</sup> Matth. xiii. 42. and xxv. 41.

<sup>d</sup> John xii. 35, 36.

## CHAPTER V.

OF THE NATURE AND THE SIGNS OF MELANCHOLY,  
WITH DIRECTIONS TO SUCH BELIEVERS AS ARE  
AFFLICTED WITH IT.

**M**ELANCHOLY, though it so weakens and disorders the mind, as to render a person unable, to enjoy the comforts, and to perform the duties of life, is, nevertheless, seated in the body. But the state of body which accompanies this disease, is acknowledged by the best Physicians, to be in general beyond the reach of their investigation. By this distemper, the mind is so disordered, that, like an inflamed eye, it becomes disqualified for discerning its objects, clearly and justly. The disease is commonly attended with gloomy thoughts, heaviness, sorrow, and fear, without any apparent cause of them. Wicked men are as liable to be afflicted with it, as good men. In the case of some, melancholy, though a bodily distemper, produces dejection of mind; in that of others, trouble of mind on spiritual accounts, especially if it be great, or of long continuance, produces the disease of melancholy in the body. Melancholy also increases trouble of mind; and trouble of mind again, increases melancholy; where they both exist together, they mutually increase and confirm each other. How great soever, a believer's grief for sin, and his dread of Divine anger,



may be; he ought not to be called melancholy, so long as these appear to be rational, and his imagination, to be sound. But, on the other hand, how small soever, his measure of sadness and of fear, may be; yet, if his imagination and mind, be so distempered or impaired, that he cannot assign a proper reason for his sadness and fear, nor express them in a rational manner, he is to be counted melancholy. Now, when a good man is at any time, afflicted with this grievous distemper, it will usually discover itself, by more or fewer of the following signs.

SECT. I. *Of the signs of melancholy, especially in a true Christian.*

A holy man, when he is under this mournful disease, commonly gives himself up to *excessive grief*: he often weeps without knowing why, and thinks that he ought to do so; and if he but appear to smile at any time, or to talk cheerfully, his heart smites him for it, as if he had done amiss.

He is usually *exceedingly timorous, or full of groundless fears*. Almost every thing that he sees, or hears of, serves to increase his dread; especially if fear, as often is the case, has been the primary cause of his melancholy.

If the distemper be not deep, sadness and fear commonly seize him *at intervals*. He is seized with fits of them, for a part of a day, or for a whole day, or even for several days together; and after some short abatement of them, they return upon him; and he feels them again fastening on his spirit, without knowing why.

Through the distemper of his imagination, he is disposed to *aggravate* his sin, or misery, or danger. Of every common infirmity or fault, he is ready to speak with horror, as if it were an atrocious crime: every ordinary affliction, he considers as utterly destructive; every small danger, as a great one; every possible danger, as probable; and every probable danger, as certain.

He often thinks that, his day of grace is *past*, and that, now it is *too late for him*, to believe, to repent, or to expect mercy. Were any one to declare to him, that redeeming grace is infinitely free, or that the riches of saving mercy in Christ, are always overflowing, or that the offers and calls of the gospel, are directed to him in particular; he would still affirm that, now it is too late, because his day of grace is undoubtedly past. No arguments will convince him that, to conclude that his day of grace is past, or that God will never shew mercy nor give grace to him, while yet, God is continually beseeching him, to accept his offers of grace, and so to be reconciled to him; is an unbelieving suspicion, that the God of truth is not sincere in his offers, and a most sinful attempt to make Him a liar<sup>c</sup>. The Christian, dejected as he is, ought seriously to consider, how atrocious, how reproachful, how dreadful, the sin of unbelief is.

He is perpetually apprehensive that, he is *utterly forsaken* by God, and is always *prone to despair*. Like one who is forlorn and desolate, his continual thought is, that he is undone, utterly undone.

<sup>c</sup> 1 John v. 10.

But he certainly ought to consider, that sinners who are *utterly* forsaken of God, are habitually willing to continue in their sinful state and frame; that they are lovers of sin, haters of holiness, and; so far as they have power and opportunity, persecutors of all who would reform them, as if they were enemies to them;—which is far indeed from being his case.

He frequently takes occasion from the doctrine of *predestination*, to despair of Divine mercy; and so, he abuses that great and fundamental doctrine. Perceiving every object, as through a coloured and distorted medium, he thinks that if the Lord hath not elected him, it will be altogether in vain for him, ever to attempt believing and repenting; and then, he strongly imagines that he is *not* elected, and therefore that it cannot be *his* duty, to hope for the mercy of God. But he would do well to recollect that, all whom God hath predestinated to the end, he hath also predestinated to the means; that, in choosing sinners to salvation, he hath chosen them to faith and repentance, not only as means, but as necessary *parts*, of salvation; and that, it is his present duty, upon the warrant of the unlimited offer of the gospel, to *choose* Christ for his Saviour, and God in him for his God, and immediately to *trust* in them, for all the parts of salvation. This would, in the mean time, be a comfortable evidence to him, that God hath *chosen him*<sup>f</sup>. To trust in the Lord Jesus, for all his salvation, and, in the faith of offered and promised mercy, to

<sup>f</sup> 2. Thess. ii. 13.

repent of all his sins, are the way to know, that he has been elected to faith and repentance, as well as to every other part of salvation.

He always asserts that he *cannot believe*, and hence concludes that he cannot be saved. If any Christian friend exhort him, to come as a sinner, to the compassionate Saviour, and to trust in Him, for salvation to himself in particular; he is ready to reply, ‘Alas! You seem to understand nothing of *my* doleful condition; otherwise, you would not exhort such a vile and unworthy sinner as I am, to trust that the holy One of God, would ever save him. Indeed, it would be daring presumption in one like me, ever to attempt trusting in Him: I dare not, I will not, I cannot, confide in him, against whom I have so heinously sinned.’ His distemper, so far as it prevails, will not permit him to exercise faith.—A dreadful chastisement, this; for his having omitted the great duty of trusting at all times, in the only Saviour, when his imagination was sound!

He is, at the same time, *utterly unable to exercise joy*, or to take comfort in any thing. He cannot comprehend, or so much as think of, any thing which is suited to comfort him. When he reads or hears, the dreadful threatenings of the violated law, it is always with application of them to himself; but when he reads or hears, the precious promises of the blessed gospel, he either takes no notice of them, or says, ‘They do not belong to me: the greater the mercy of God, and the riches of his grace, are, the more miserable am I, who have no part in them.’ He looks upon his wife, children, friends, house, wealth, and all, without the least

comfort ; as a man would do, who is going, for his crimes, to suffer the most tormenting death. He is like a man in continual sickness or pain, who cannot take pleasure in any thing around him, because the feeling of his incessant pain prevents him.

He never reads or hears of, any dreadful example of Divine judgment, but he presently imagines that it will *soon be his own case*. If he hears of Cain, or of Pharoah, given up to hardness of heart ; or but reads that, some are vessels of wrath, *fitted* to destruction, or that, they have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, hearts and understand not ; he thinks that this is his very case, or that it is all spoken of him. If he hears of any tremendous judgment inflicted on one, he concludes that it will also be executed on him : if he is told that, some person is become distracted, or has died suddenly, or died in despair ; he presently thinks, that it will be so with himself. The reading of Spira's dreadful condition, has, I believe, increased melancholy in many ; the ignorant author having described a case of the plainest, and the deepest melancholy, contracted by means of mental trouble, arising from sin committed against conscience, as if it had been the rational despair of a sound understanding.

He persuades himself that, *none ever was* in such a dismal condition, as that in which he is. Although he be ever so often told that, many of the saints have been in this very case ; yet he still persists in saying, ‘ Never was any one’s case like mine.’

His conscience is usually *quick*, in charging him with sin, in presenting to his view, the in-

finite punishment which he deserves for his sin, and in urging him on to still greater dejection of mind, as *his duty*. But he seems dead to all the duties, which directly tend to his consolation ; such as, praising the Lord, thanksgiving for manifold mercies, meditating on the glorious Redeemer, and on the love, the grace, and the promises of God. Press these, and such as these, ever so frequently upon him, and he will make no conscience of them : he will regard them as duties for others, but not for him.

He is always *displeased and discontented with himself* ; just as a peevish, or froward person is apt to be, with others. Is such a man hard to be pleased? Is he ready to find fault with every thing, which he sees or hears of ; and is he offended with every one, who comes in his way? Just so, is a melancholy man, with respect to *himself* : he is always suspicious of himself, always finding fault, always displeased with himself.

His thoughts, for the most part, are turned inward *upon himself*. Like millstones, which grind on themselves, when they have no grain between them, his thoughts are usually employed upon themselves. When he suspects that he has thought irregularly, he thinks again and again, on that which he has already been thinking of. He does not usually meditate much on God, (except on his terrible majesty, justice, and wrath,) nor on Christ, nor heaven, nor the state of the church, nor, indeed, on any thing without himself : his thoughts are all abstracted, and turned inward upon himself, and are such as tend, not to alleviate, but rather to increase, his perturbation. His musing on him-

self, is chiefly, that he may perceive the working of Satan, in himself; that he may find, in the depravity or infirmity of his nature, as much of the hateful image of that wicked one, as he can: but the holy image of God in him, he frowardly overlooks, and will not acknowledge. And so, as noble objects of thought, raise the soul; as amiable objects, kindle love in it; as cheering objects, fill it with delight; and as God in Christ, who possesses every excellence, doth elevate, and perfect, and make it happy; so, mean objects of thought, debase it; loathsome objects, fill it with disgust; and mournful objects, impress it with sadness. To fix, therefore, his thoughts incessantly upon his depravity and misery, cannot fail to increase the sadness of his spirit.

He commonly gives himself up to *idleness*; either lying in bed, or sitting unprofitably by himself: he is much averse from labour, especially, from the work of his *usual* calling.

At the same time, he is daily harassed with *fears of want, poverty and misery*, to himself and his family; and sometimes even of imprisonment, or banishment. He is often afraid that some body will murder him; and, if he but perceives any one whispering to another, or winking with the eye, he presently suspects, that they are plotting to take away his life.

He is *weary of company*, for the most part, and is much addicted to solitude.

His thoughts are commonly *all perplexed*, like those of a man who is in a labyrinth, or pathless wilderness, or who has lost his way in the dark. He is continually poring and groping about, and

can make out nothing, but is bewildered and entangled the more; and he is full of perplexing fears, out of which he cannot find the way.

He is for ordinary, endless in his *scruples*; afraid lest he sin, in every thought; every word, every look; in all the food that he eats, and in all the clothing that he wears: and if he resolves to amend his ways, he is still scrupulous, with regard to his designed amendments. He dares neither speak, nor be silent; neither travel, nor stay at home, but scruples every thing; as if his conscience were wholly enslaved by self-perplexing scruples.

Hence it comes to pass, that he commonly addicts himself much to *superstition*. He makes laws for himself, which God never made for him. He ensnares himself, by unnecessary resolutions, vows, and austerities. He places much of his religion, in outward self-imposed tasks; such as, to spend so many hours of every day, in this or that act of devotion; to wear such and such clothes, and forbear others that are fitter for him; to forbear all sorts of food that please the taste, and such like.

He has lost the power of governing his thoughts by *reason*. If a Christian friend exhort him, ever so earnestly and frequently, to forbear his unprofitable, self-perplexing thoughts, and to turn his mind to cheering objects, he is unable to comply. He seems to be under a necessity, of thinking anxious and distracting thoughts: he cannot turn away his mind, from gloomy and frightful ideas. He cannot meditate on redeeming love, grace, or mercy. He can no more cease to muse on that, which is already the subject of his thoughts, than

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a man, afflicted with a violent toothach, can forbear, at the time, to think of his pain.

Hence he usually becomes incapable, to engage in *secret prayer or meditation*. When he would try to pray or to meditate, his thoughts are presently thrown all into confusion. He cannot fix or keep them, upon any object without himself; for a dis-tempered, and confused imagination, with a weak reason which cannot govern it, is the very disease with which he is afflicted. Sometimes terror drives him from prayer. He dares not hope, and therefore dares not pray; and usually, he has not courage to receive the Lord's Supper. If he be at any time, prevailed on to receive it, he is presently filled with dread, fearing that, by partaking unworthily, he has eaten and drunk judgment to himself.

The consequence is, that he begins to feel an uncommon degree of *averseness* from religious exercises. Hence he rashly concludes that, he is a hater of God and of holiness; imputing the effects of his bodily distemper, to his soul; while yet he would rather love God, and be holy, than have all the riches, honours, and pleasures, in the universe. Strictly speaking, it is rather to the renewed perplexity and terror, which he experiences in those exercises, that he is averse, than to the duties themselves: for he still desires to have that calmness of spirit, that confidence and delight in the Lord Jesus, which he would be glad to express by prayer and praise. Here we ought to distinguish between that degree of averseness, which is so predominant, as habitually, and entirely, to overcome holiness in the soul; and that degree,

which indeed strives vehemently against it, but does not overcome it. Every holy man has some degree of backwardness to spiritual exercises, remaining in him; but if this had dominion over him, he would *willingly* abandon them; which he is far from being permitted ever to do. Still however, he may, when he is under melancholy, be so deterred from some *external* duties, as to give them over for a time. Many real believers have, for a season, been deterred from receiving the Sacrament of the Supper. Some of them, when under deep melancholy, and strong temptation, have even given up outward prayer, hearing, and reading of the word of God; and yet, they have not lost their desire of holiness, which is *inward* prayer, nor their desire to believe, love, and obey the gospel.

He is commonly occupied much, with *eager and conflicting thoughts*. He now and then feels, as if something were speaking within him, and as if all his own violent thoughts, were the impulses and pleadings of another. He, therefore, uses frequently to attribute his irregular fancies, either to some extraordinary motions of the Holy Spirit, or even to some uncommon agency of Satan. He often uses such expressions as these: 'It was impressed on my heart, *or*, It was said to me, that I must do thus and thus; and soon afterwards I was told, that I must not do this or that.' He conceives that, his imagination is something talking within him, and saying to him, all that he is thinking of.

Hence he becomes *intractable and very obstinate* in adhering to his own conceits. It is with the utmost difficulty, that he can be persuaded to relin-

quish any one of them, however irrational. He, at the same time, becomes peevish and froward: it is easy to offend him, and difficult to please him.

It is seldom that the most *convincing argument*, or that the *best advice*, though pressed upon him in the most affectionate and attractive manner, does him any good. If a Christian friend tries to persuade him, that, he has some evidences of a work of grace begun in his soul, and so far succeeds, as to lessen, in a small degree, the dejection of his mind; yet, as soon as he again views his heart and life, through the medium of his perturbing humours, every such argument and advice is forgotten, and he is as far from serenity of mind, as ever. Any encouraging thought of his state, to which, one can be the means of helping him, seldom continues above a day or two.

When his melancholy becomes deep, he is almost constantly *troubled* with hideous and blasphemous *temptations*, against God, or Christ, or the Scripture, or the immortality of the soul. These arise *partly* from his own fears, which make him think most of that, of which he is most afraid to think. The very uneasiness, occasioned by his fears, attracts and confines his thoughts to that which he dreads. As he who is over desirous of sleeping, and is fearing that he shall not sleep, is likely to continue awake, because his desire and fear keep him waking; so the fears and anxieties of him who is melancholy, do counteract themselves. But these temptations arise *chiefly* from Satan, who seizing the opportunity of the Christian's being under that disease, vexes him, and tempts him to blasphemous thoughts. For, as that crafty and malicious ene-

my of the saints, knows that, he can more easily and successfully, tempt a melancholy saint, to unbelieving, despairing, and blasphemous thoughts, than any other saint; so, when permitted, he will be sure, vehemently to instigate him to such thoughts. Hence a good man, when he is under strong melancholy, often feels, as if something within him, was forcibly urging him to utter some blasphemous, or sinful expression; and he can have no rest, unless he yield to the temptation: but no sooner does he yield, than he is tempted utterly to despair, because he has committed so heinous a sin: and when Satan has gained this advantage over him, he still, to increase his dejection of spirit, sets it before him. It is wonderful, what extraordinary acuteness, the Christian, under this grievous distemper, will discover, in evading the force of the strongest arguments, that can be urged for his comfort: but I believe that Satan is, on such occasions, permitted to suggest his answers to him, and to assist him in setting them in the strongest light possible.

Upon the tempter's gaining that advantage over him, he further prompts him to conclude, that he has been guilty of *the sin against the Holy Spirit*, which will never be forgiven him. This increases his despair of mercy. The man who indeed commits that horrible sin, must be a *professed* infidel; and that in opposition to *confessed* miracles. And yet the melancholy believer despairs, because he dreads that he has committed that sin; though, perhaps, he neither understands what it is, nor has any reason, but his own groundless fear, or some blasphemous temptation which he abhors, for ima-

gining that he has been guilty of it. Alas! he does not consider that, a temptation is one thing, and a sin, another; and that, no man has less cause to fear, that he shall be condemned for his transgression, than he who abhorreth sin most, and is least willing to commit it: for no man can be less willing to commit iniquity, than the Christian afflicted with melancholy, is, to be guilty of those blasphemous and hideous thoughts, of which he bitterly complains.

When a good man, under deep melancholy, has been long harassed with suggestions to blasphemy and despair, he at length begins to dread, that he *is possessed by Satan*. A man may be said to be possessed by Satan, when that enemy is at any time permitted to exercise, in a certain measure, his power on him; and that, by a stated and effectual operation, either on his soul, or on his body. The devil thus possesses the *souls* of the ungodly<sup>s</sup>; but he is never permitted for a single moment, thus to possess those of the saints. But, though he cannot possess the *souls* of any of the saints; yet he may, as in the case of Job, be suffered to possess for a season, the *bodies* of some of them. He may, perhaps, in the hand of the Lord, be an instrument of inflicting, among other distempers, the disease of melancholy on them; and he may also, by harassing them with horrible and despairing suggestions, be an instrument of increasing that grievous disease. But let it still be remembered by the dejected believer, that Satan's exercising for a season, such power on the body, as may be termed a

<sup>s</sup> Eph. ii. 2.

*possession* of it ; is no sign at all, of an unregenerate state, or of his having gained possession again of that soul, from which, he had, in the day of regeneration, been cast out. Still, however, as this malicious and cruel enemy, often raises a storm of persecution against the Christian, from without ; so, in proportion as the Lord permitteth him, he likewise produces trouble within. It should also be regarded by the disconsolate saint, as matter of unspeakable comfort ; that, of all men, none loves the sin under which he sighs, less than *he* does, for it is the heaviest burthen of his soul ; and that, no sin evinceth Satan's possession of a soul, but that which the man loves, more than he hates, and which he would rather keep, than forsake. The melancholy Christian should likewise, for his encouragement, recollect that, God will charge his temptations, only upon Satan himself, and nowise upon him, so long as he receives them not, by the consent of his will, but continues to abhor them ; and that, he will no more condemn him, for those evil effects, which, produced by the force of a bodily disease, are unavoidable ; than he will condemn a man, for raving thoughts or words, in a strong fever or delirium <sup>h</sup>. But, so far as reason in the dejected Christian, yet has power, and his understanding, the government of his passions ; it is doubtless his own fault, if he do not exert himself in using that power, though the great difficulty of using it, renders his fault the less.

If his melancholy become very deep, the dejected believer often imagines that he *hears voices, and*

<sup>h</sup> Ps. ciii. 13, 14.

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*sees lights and apparitions*, or that something meets him, and says this or that to him ; when all, is but the error of a diseased imagination and an impaired intellect.

In consequence of the continued, and harassing perplexity of his mind, under strong melancholy, the dejected Christian becomes *weary even of his life*. Some, under deep melancholy, are strongly tempted to make away with themselves ; and they are assaulted with the temptation, so incessantly, and so forcibly, that they can go no where, but they feel, as if somewhat within were instigating them, vehemently, and saying, ‘ Do it.’ For the grievous disease, under which they labour, will permit them to feel nothing, but anguish and despair, and to say nothing, but that they are forsaken, and miserable, and undone. It not only makes them weary of their lives, even while they are sore afraid to die ; but it affords Satan a special opportunity, to urge them to destroy themselves : so that, if they by themselves, happen to be crossing on a bridge, he urges them to leap into the water ; if they when alone, see a knife, or any other destructive weapon, he instigates them to kill themselves with it ; and they usually feel, as if something within them, were importunately urging them, saying, ‘ Do it, do it instantly.’ Hence some of them, begin secretly to contrive how they may accomplish it ; yea, and so far yield to the importunity of the tempter, as actually to destroy themselves. This undoubtedly would be self-murder, were it not that, the doleful distemper, under which they labour, so impairs their understanding,

as to render them at the time, incapable to resist the horrible temptation.

Although the use of means, for the preservation and recovery of Christians, afflicted with melancholy, belongs as much to others connected with them, as to themselves; yet, so far as it is possible for themselves to exercise their reason, they must be warned, 1. To *abhor* all such temptations, and not for a moment, to give place to them, in their minds; 2. To *avoid carefully all occasions* of yielding to them; so as not to go near a river, or any instrument, which, Satan would instigate them to use for that purpose; 3. And, to *make known their case* without delay, to some of their Christian friends; in order that, suitable means may be employed for their preservation, and restoration to health.

Finally, The dejected Christian, after all, *will not believe*, that he is under the disease of melancholy; but will be displeased, if he hear any friend so much as hint it to him; and will affirm that, it is but the *rational sense*, of his extreme misery, or, of being utterly forsaken by God, and of lying under his terrible wrath. It is therefore with no small difficulty, that he can be persuaded, to observe the prescriptions and directions of a Physician, or to employ any means whatever, for the cure of his bodily disease; asserting that his body is in perfect health, and that it is only his soul that is troubled<sup>1</sup>.

These are, for the most part, the signs of melan-

<sup>1</sup> For the greater part of these signs of melancholy; I have been indebted to CLIFFORD's Collection.



choly, especially when the *true Christian* is in that dismal case ;—a case, to be pitied, but never to be scorned. Let no man despise, or vilify such ; for men of all descriptions, are liable to that grievous malady ; high and low, learned and unlearned, religious and irreligious, yea, and persons, who have hitherto lived in the greatest jollity and luxury : such have actually fallen under it, as often as it hath pleased the Lord, to make them thus feel some of the dreadful effects of his hot displeasure, for their aggravated transgressions of his holy law.

SECT. II. *Directions to Christians who are afflicted with melancholy.*

IF the disease has proceeded far, or become strong, directions to those Christians themselves, are commonly to little purpose ; because their minds are so weakened, that they cannot comply with them. But, because in some, especially, when the distemper has but lately begun to seize them, there is some power of understanding, and of reason, still remaining ; I shall offer them, the following directions and advices :

1. Endeavour to *understand well, the covenant of grace*. Study, without delay, to attain just and clear views of the infinite riches, suitableness, and freeness, of the grace of that everlasting covenant. The better you understand, and the more you think of, that wonderful contract, in which, complete salvation is purchased, promised, and sure to you ; the more, under the consoling influences of the Spirit of grace, will your souls be sustained, and your tempers be sweetened. Think as often of the

righteousness of Jesus Christ, as of your own sinfulness ; as often of his fulness of grace, as of your own emptiness of grace ; and as frequently of the boundless love, grace, and mercy, of your Covenant-God, as of his majesty, holiness, and justice. The way to diminish, and even to overcome those terrors, which arise from partial, and false apprehensions of God, is, to attain spiritual, clear, and enlarged views of Him, as a God whose glory it is, to be merciful and gracious even to the chief of sinners ; and who will certainly shew mercy to them, who unfeignedly desire to honour him, and to be eternal debtors to his redeeming grace, for all their salvation. Let your thoughts also dwell on these cheering truths ; That the Lord Jesus hath, according to that well-ordered and sure covenant, given such an infinite satisfaction to Divine justice, for your sins, as secures you from eternal death ; that he hath performed such a perfect obedience to the Divine law, as merits for you eternal life ; and, that life eternal is to you, the infinitely free gift of God <sup>k</sup>.

2. Be *firmly persuaded*, that the incarnate Redeemer, with his righteousness and fulness, is, in the gospel, *offered to you* as sinners of mankind. Constantly believe not only that, He is able and willing to save you ; but that, by his eternal Father and himself, he is freely, wholly, and particularly, offered to you <sup>l</sup>. Believe cordially the record, “ that God *giveth to you*, eternal life, and that this life is in his son <sup>m</sup>.” Consider that, it is not

<sup>k</sup> Rom. vi. 23. <sup>l</sup> John vi. 32. Isa. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17.  
<sup>m</sup> 1 John. v. 11.

your sin but your *duty*, always to believe that to you in particular, He giveth in offer his Son, with righteousness and life eternal in Him; and that, it is not your sin but your duty, likewise to believe that the Father's authentic offer of him to you, affords you a warrant, *presently* to confide in him for salvation to yourselves, or, to trust that he saveth, and will continue to save you. It would be presumption in any of the fallen angels, to trust in him for their salvation, because he is not offered to them; but it is not presumption in you, but a duty, to confide in him for all your salvation; because the offer, the call, and the commandment to believe in him, are directed to you, in common with all other hearers of the gospel; and these afford you a right, at all times, to place the confidence of your hearts in him for grace and glory. Believe then that, seeing you have an ample warrant, to trust confidently in the Saviour for the whole of your salvation, it cannot be your sin but your duty, your *principal* duty to do so. O if ye but saw, in the light of his word and Spirit, and believed, your Divine warrant, to come as you are, to come at all times, and confide in the Lord Jesus for complete salvation;—how greatly would it alleviate the trouble of your minds <sup>a</sup>!

3. Be persuaded to *trust accordingly* in Jesus Christ, for all the inestimable blessings and comforts of a free salvation, to yourselves in particular. Come, as unworthy, as lost sinners in yourselves; come, not upon the ground of any qualifications in yourselves, but upon the warrant af-

<sup>a</sup> John iv. 10. Ps. xxviii. 7.

fording you by the gospel-offer, and intrust your whole salvation to the compassionate Saviour. Rely with unsuspecting confidence, on the faithful, the dear Redeemer, for the enjoyment of all that is offered to you, in the glorious gospel. There, all the love of his heart is, in and with himself, offered to you: trust therefore that he *loveth* you °. His consummate righteousness is granted to you: rely upon it for all your *title* to eternal life. All his salvation is also presented to you, for your acceptance: trust therefore that his right hand will *save* you p. Since it is all offered to you, as a free gift of grace; trust, with the entire approbation and consent of your hearts, that he will save you in a way of boundless *grace* q. Seeing all the good things of this life, which are necessary for you, are likewise offered; trust that he will give you *these* also, in the kind, and the measure, that he sees good for you r. All the promises of his eternal covenant, are, in the indefinite offer, left and directed to you: trust therefore that he will *perform* them to you, and so, save you with an everlasting salvation. The absolute promises of the Spirit and of faith especially, are, in the offer, given to you: trust that he will give his Spirit to you, and thereby *enable* you, yet more and more to believe in him. O that ye knew what a comfort it is, that the great Redeemer hath made it your *duty*, to trust at all times in Him, and in God through him. He *commandeth* you to trust in him, with all your heart s; and therefore you may be assured

° 1 John iv. 16.

p Ps. cxxxviii. 7.

q Acts xv. 11.

r Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

s Prov. iii. 5.

that, he will not deceive your confidence, nor disappoint your expectation. Ah ! if a faithful and able friend but suggest, that you may depend on him for relief, in some external difficulty, ye will most readily confide in him, and believe that he will not deceive you ; and yet, you cannot trust a faithful, an almighty Redeemer, though he commandeth you to do it, and promiseth “ that he will not turn away from you, to do you good ‘.”

4. Love not the good things of this world so, as to place, either your *happiness, or your confidence*, in them. No objects whatever can continue in your possession, except Christ and God in him. No mercies can either be satisfying, or sure to you, but “ the sure mercies of David “.” Set not, then, such a high value on any of the empty and transitory things of this world, as to put it in their power ever to disquiet your souls. Reproaches, injuries, losses,—these are all *without* you: they cannot come in to your souls to vex them ; unless ye yourselves, open the door to let them enter. The Lord sendeth affliction upon your bodies, and it may be, permitteth men to injure you in your good names, and worldly estates ; but it is yourselves only, who suffer these, or any other outward calamities, to enter and to vex your souls. The things of this world, are still so high in your estimation, and they lie so near to your heart, that you cannot suffer the loss of any of them, without vexation of spirit. Ah ! that the world should seem so great, and that God in Christ should appear so small, in your view, as not to satisfy you,

‘ Jer. xxxii. 40.

“ Isa. lv. 3.

except when ye can have the world along with him! O watch diligently, against the inordinate love of earthly things; for it will dispose you to indulge distracting care, and repining opposition of spirit, to the holy disposals of adorable providence. It is anxious care, and peevish discontent, that are often, at first, the occasions of melancholy. They usually so disturb a man's mind, as to render it defenceless against those temptations, respecting the state of his soul, with which Satan will afterwards assail him. The disquietness, which hath been occasioned by outward crosses, is then removed to his conscience, and so inflames it, that he begins to be for a long season, oppressed with many fears about the salvation of his soul. Thus, as if the Lord had not afflicted him enough, he adds to his own affliction. Only consider how heinous a sin it is, so to love the world, as to set up your own wills, in opposition to the holy will, and providence of the Most High. By repining against Him, you secretly accuse him, and by accusing him, ye blaspheme his worthy name. Consider that, the resignation of your wills in *every* thing, to the will of God, is a principal branch of holiness; and that, it is in proportion as ye take complacency in His blessed will, that your hearts are comforted. O be persuaded to trust firmly that, God in Christ loveth you and bestoweth Himself upon you, as your everlasting *portion*; and that, the Lord Jesus will give you that which is *good*, and withhold *no good* thing from you: for that is the way, through the Spirit, to mortify the inordinate love of the world.

5. Be *not* solitary, but as little and as seldom as possible. A time for retirement from company is, indeed, to those Christians who are well, a season of the greatest value for meditation, self-examination, and prayer; but to *you*, it is a season of great danger. If the devil, with his temptations, assaulted Christ himself, when he found Him in a wilderness, remote from company; much more will he assail you, if he find you solitary. It is your duty therefore to be, as often as attention to your other duties will permit, in the company of humble, faithful, and cheerful Christians; especially, of those whose views of the gospel are clear, whose faith is strong, and who can speak from experience, of deliverance from dejection of spirit. It may also be of advantage to you, if ye confer at a time, even with Christians, whose cases are similar to your own; in order to be satisfied, that your condition is far from being singular.

6. Recollect frequently that, although it is a sin to yield to a temptation; yet, *it is not a sin* to be tempted. Jesus Christ himself, “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” He was tempted to the most atrocious and horrible sins, yea, even to fall down and worship the devil; and yet, having with perfect abhorrence resisted every temptation, He still was without sin. You can at no time, be tempted to more horrible iniquities, than those to which, the holy One of God was tempted. Though you cannot endure temptation without sin, as He could; yet, as it is not

” Heb. iv. 15.

every sinful inclination in the heart of a believer, that is to be considered as a compliance with a temptation, ye should not charge upon yourselves, that which is the sin only of the tempter.

7. Consider *how much it gratifies Satan*, to see you indulging gloomy and despondent thoughts. It pleases that gloomy spirit exceedingly, to perceive you sullen and melancholy, like himself; to behold you distrusting your Saviour, and suspecting your God to be an enemy to you, and that, under the pretence of being deeply humbled and grieved for your sins. That surely cannot be, either your duty, or your ornament, which gratifies the devil, and serves to promote the interests of his kingdom. That can be no honour to you, which robs your gracious God and Father, of the honour of his redeeming grace; and which disposes you to hate him, and to flee from his presence, as if he was your implacable enemy.

8. Meditate frequently on the *promises and grace* of the gospel; but let each of your meditations, be *short* and easy. A deep and continued meditation, will but harass and perplex your minds, and render you the more unable to perform your other duties. Your imagination and mind are, at present, so weakened, that you cannot employ them in a fixed and protracted meditation, without increasing thereby your malady. Do not mistake my meaning: I am not directing you to neglect meditation, especially on consoling subjects, but, to forbear *deep and long* meditation; because, in your present condition, it will strengthen your painful distemper. A short meditation on some cheering subject, may



be a mean of lessening, and even of removing, your dejection ; whereas, a deep and continued meditation will distract you, and by increasing your disease, will render you the less able, to perform the other duties incumbent on you. When ye are at any time meditating, do not look down into the gloomy dungeon of your own heart, where, at present, nothing can be seen but darkness or confusion ; but look away from yourselves, to the compassionate Redeemer, and to God, as a God of infinite grace in Him. Instead of poring on your own hearts, to discern if love to Christ be there ; you ought rather to be thinking of the infinite loveliness of Christ, and of his love to you. This would be the means, of exciting the exercise of your love to him, and of bringing it forth to your view. A sight of your own hearts, will but render you the more melancholy ; whereas, a believing view of the glorious grace of the Redeemer, will comfort you. Frequent thoughts of the Lamb of God, who loved you, and gave himself for you, and of the love and mercy of God in Him, would, through the Holy Spirit, produce sweetness and love in your hearts ; when, on the contrary, fixed thoughts of sin, and of the wrath of God, would beget bitterness and aversion of spirit from him.

9. Be frequently employed in *ejaculatory prayer*, and let your stated prayers be *shorter* than ordinary. In your present case, you are not able to continue in these holy exercises, so long as formerly. Since therefore ye cannot do as ye would, ye should do as you can. If sickness or pain of body, excuses a man for being short in devotional duties, because nature is then so debilitated, that it cannot hold out

long ; the sickness of the natural spirits, which enfeebles, not only the body, but also the mind, may well excuse him. When ye feel yourselves unable to continue long in prayer, as ye cannot miss to do, struggle not too hard, in opposition to enfeebled nature ; for this, by increasing your distemper, will disable you the more for every duty. Study at the same time to retain, as much as possible, your relish for holy exercises ; and to guard against every thing, that would render them troublesome, or grievous to you. Let not your present inability, to continue so long in prayer as formerly, discourage you ; for this also would increase your malady. Endeavour, when you are praying, to employ as much of the time, in thankful acknowledgement of mercies, as in penitent confession of sins. Were ye to employ, even *more* of the time, in thanksgiving and praise, than, in confession and complaint ; it might, under the influences of the blessed Comforter, be a mean of lessening, or even of removing, the bitterness of your spirits.

10. Be not discouraged, though in your holy exercises you have no *lively* feelings, nor *elevating* conceptions. These, however desirable and useful they are, yet cannot, in your present condition, be reasonably expected. Although they are sometimes enjoyed by many holy persons, yet they are not the essentials of true holiness. Lively feelings, depend more on one's natural constitution, than many are willing to allow. Some Christians have naturally a quicker sensibility, than others. A very small affair will make some of them, feel deeply. They who live nearest to God, are commonly not those, who have the liveliest feelings and emotions.

of joy or grief; but those, who are most conformed to the holy image of the Son of God, and who, from principles of faith and love, are most devoted to Him, and most inclined, at all times, to do his will. Many believers, especially when dejected in spirit, have bewailed bitterly, their want of *deep feelings*; who, if their feelings had been but in the smallest degree, deeper or livelier, than they already were, might have been disordered, and even distracted by them.

11. Be *diligent*, from principles of faith and love, in doing the work of your lawful calling. Be constantly occupied, as far as your bodily strength will permit, in doing seasonably, your proper work; and consider that it is very sinful, as well as dangerous, to squander any part of your precious time in idleness. The Lord hath commanded you, to labour six days; and therefore, you cannot neglect prosecuting your secular business, without omitting your duty, and thereby incurring, in a still higher degree, the displeasure of your heavenly Father. Besides, if ye allow yourselves, but for a short season, to be unemployed, Satan will be sure to find employment for you. By being idle, you *invite* him both to tempt and to trouble you; and he will not fail, instantly to seize an opportunity, so very favourable to his design. Then, ye will have leisure to hearken to him, and to revolve in your minds, every one of his infernal suggestions. Your precious time is continually hasting away, and the Lord hath allowed you none to consume in idleness. If then, you, notwithstanding, allow yourselves to squander any part of it in sloth; you may thereby provoke the Lord to permit Satan

to harass you in a very uncommon degree. No pretence of employing your time in exercises of devotion, will excuse your idleness; for you are omitting that duty, which the holy law of God requires<sup>x</sup>. Besides, you should consider that, to employ your time as formerly, in the work of your lawful vocation, especially if it be in the open air, will probably be a most effectual mean of curing you of your bodily distemper.

12. Represent your case to some skilful, cheerful, and humble Minister or private Christian, and *follow diligently* his directions. Your imagination is so distempered, and your mind is so weakened, that you cannot judge aright, either of your condition, or of your duty. Your diseased imagination will represent every object to your mind, in dark and frightful colours. Relate your case, therefore, to some skilful and faithful counsellor; especially, to one who himself was once in your afflicted condition; and do not despise his judgment concerning, either your dejection, or the means to be used for the removal of it. Be directed by him, with respect to the subjects of your thoughts, the objects of your fears, the scruples of your consciences, and the manner of your devotional exercises. “Be not wise in your own conceits.” Do not obstinately adhere to every fancy, that strikes your minds; but, distrusting your own understandings, follow resolutely the directions of an experienced, and cheerful Christian. This is prescribed by the Spirit of God; and he will bless his own ordinance<sup>y</sup>.

<sup>x</sup> Prov. xxvii. 23. Rom. xii. 11. <sup>y</sup> Job xxxiii. 23—25.

## 190 ADVICES TO RELATIONS AND FRIENDS OF

13. If you have reason to apprehend, that your malady is *increasing*, ye ought to consult a skilful Physician; and, in the hope that you shall in due time recover, *to observe carefully* his prescriptions. Since the body is afflicted as well as the mind, you should, in order to a removal of your dejection, follow the directions of the Physician, as well as of the Divine. This is one of the duties required of you, in the sixth commandment of the moral law. Indeed, until the disease of the body be in some degree removed, it cannot be reasonably expected, that the mind will be relieved.

14. Finally, Trust that the Lord Jesus, whose infinite compassions fail not, will, as far as it shall be for his glory and your good, command *deliverance* for you. “Though,” for a season, “he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies <sup>2</sup>.” Instead of trusting in the means, which it is still your duty diligently to use, trust in your infinitely compassionate Saviour; and, in the exercise of humble confidence in Him, let each of you say, “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon me <sup>2</sup>:” “Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance <sup>b</sup>.”

### SECT. III. *ADVICES to the RELATIONS and FRIENDS of such Christians, as are afflicted with melancholy.*

It will now be proper, to subjoin some advices to those relatives and friends of Christians under melancholy, who are often in their company, and to whom it belongs to take care of them.

<sup>2</sup> Lam. iii. 32.

<sup>a</sup> Mic. vii. 19.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. xxxii. 7.

1. I would counsel you to regard them, at all times, with *the most tender compassion*. Of all the maladies to which, persons in this valley of tears, are liable, melancholy is the most dismal and overwhelming. Other distempers seize the body only ; but this fastens on, both the body and the mind at once. It disquiets a man's mind, disorders his thoughts, and fills his soul with anguish and horror. Look then on such Christian friends, as are under this dreadful distemper, with the greatest pity and tenderness. Considering that, ye yourselves are also in the body, and are obnoxious to the same overwhelming malady, regard them with the most affectionate and tender sympathy. They are deeply afflicted in body, and sore vexed in spirit. Their minds are troubled. Their spirits are dejected. Their consciences are inflamed. Their sighs are deep. The language of their doleful condition, especially to *you*, is the same as that of Job, to his friends ;—" Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends ; for the hand of God hath touched me <sup>c</sup>."

2. *Pray frequently and fervently* to the Lord for them, and *request* other Christians, to pray for them likewise. In presenting your supplications for them, you have strong arguments to plead. Ye may plead, that the Lord Jesus endured unparalleled anguish of soul, as well as torment of body, for them ; that their trouble is so great and overwhelming, that none but He, can help or deliver them ; that the more insupportable, their anguish and terror are, the more illustriously, will his

<sup>c</sup> Job ix. 21.

power and mercy be displayed, in delivering them ; that the more dismal and formidable their distress is, the more gloriously will the kindness of his love be manifested, in creating peace to their troubled souls ; and that the less others can do, to relieve them, and the more unworthy of relief they are, the more brightly, will the glory of his redeeming *grace*, shine, in saving them. And though they may, under deep despondency and terror, even forbid you to pray any more for them ; yet persist you still, in sending up your supplications to the Father of mercies, in their behalf, and in requesting others to do the same : for, if the Lord stir up you and his saints around you, to continue instant in prayer for them, he will, in due season, “ stir up his strength, and come and save them <sup>d</sup>.” The Lord Jesus saith to his disciples, “ If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them, of my Father which is in heaven <sup>e</sup>.” Accordingly, when many of the saints were gathered together, and employed in praying for Peter, who was kept in prison ; the Lord delivered him, at the very time in which, they were presenting their supplications for his deliverance <sup>f</sup>.

3. Study frequently to suggest *grounds* of comfort to them, by telling them especially, that the Lord can, and that you trust he will, *shortly deliver them*. Endeavour often to revive their drooping spirits, by reminding them that the Father of mercies can in a moment, command deliverance for them ; and that ye hope, “ He will satisfy them

<sup>d</sup> Ps. lxxx. 2.

<sup>e</sup> Matth. xviii. 19.

<sup>f</sup> Acts xii. 12.

*early* with his mercy, and make them glad, according to the days wherein he hath afflicted them, and the years wherein they have seen evil <sup>s</sup>." Remind them frequently that the more bitter, their anguish is, the more sweet, will their deliverance be; and that the more deep and doleful, their sadness is, the more delightful, will their joy be. Encourage them likewise, by repeating daily to them, that many others have been in as deep anguish, as they are; and yet have afterwards, been made to rejoice in the light of God's countenance. By encouraging discourse like this, you may, by the blessing of God, give them some faint hope of deliverance; which will alleviate their doleful trouble, and console their wounded spirit.

4. Often remind them, of the infinitely rich and free *grace* of the Lord Jesus, of his being in the gospel freely and wholly *offered* to them, and of the ample warrant afforded them by the offer, to *trust* in him, for all salvation to themselves in particular. Exhort them daily, to come as they are, to come as sinners in themselves, and to intrust the whole of their salvation to Jesus Christ. Put them often in mind, that this is their first, their principal duty; and, that their neglecting of this, is their greatest sin <sup>h</sup>. Urge them daily, to trust that the Lord Jesus loveth them, with a free, an immense, and an everlasting love; and that he will surely bestow upon them, all the salvation that he offereth to them. Remind them frequently, that God in Christ is infinitely merciful and gracious; that as the heaven is higher than the earth,

<sup>s</sup> Ps. xc. 14, 15.

<sup>h</sup> 1 John iii. 23. John iii. 18.



so his thoughts of mercy and grace, are higher than their thoughts of guilt and unworthiness, of misery and despondency; and that the very chief of sinners have been, and still may be, pardoned and received into his favour. The greatest kindness, that you can shew them, next to praying for them, is, to set the consoling truths of the gospel often before them: for *these*, in the hand of the adorable Comforter, are fitter than any thing else, to comfort them.

5. Do not relate in their hearing, *any mournful or frightful tale*: for if they hear a doleful story, their diseased imagination is prepared to fasten upon it, and thereby to increase the sadness of their spirit. The hearing of a melancholy tale, will throw them into a still more violent perturbation of mind; and so, will strengthen their doleful malady. They are commonly very acute, in exaggerating every dismal story, and in turning it to their own prejudice; so that, when they read or hear any sad and shocking narrative, they will not fail to say within themselves, ‘If it is so grievous, so terrible, to be treated with such severity, such barbarity; how miserable, how dismal, how dreadful, must our condition be, when we have a sin-avenging God, for our infinite enemy, and have no prospect, but that of being tormented in fire and brimstone, for ever and ever!’ Their hearts already meditate terror; and therefore every sad account which they happen to hear, increases their terror. It pours oil into the flame. Study then, as much as possible, never to mention before them, any thing that would add to their mental trouble.

6. When you converse with them, upon reli-

gious subjects, *do not press upon their minds and consciences, the law as a covenant of works.* The law in its covenant-form, should be set before believers, as well as before others ; but *not* before such believers, as are afflicted with deep melancholy. To set the fiery law, more and more home to them, when they are already overwhelmed, by a sense of contracted guilt, and by a dread of eternal wrath ; is indeed the way to inflame, but not to heal, the wounds of their consciences. The law as a rule, indeed, ought frequently to be urged upon them ; but not the law as a broken covenant. They are already much cast down ; and they should rather be *lifted up*, by the comforts of the gospel, than cast down still lower, by the terrors of the violated law.

7. Do not, at any time, speak to them *in a harsh or passionate strain.* Bitter words will do them no good, but will, on the contrary, inflame their wounds, and so increase their anguish. If you desire to be instrumental, in alleviating their sorrows, and in removing their sadness ; do not, on any pretence whatever, irritate their minds by rugged speeches. To rebuke or upbraid them now, when they are least able to bear it, will but imbitter their wounded spirits, and so add to their dejection. Do not say to them, That they complain without a cause ; for they would not complain, if their hearts were not perplexed, by the terrors of the Almighty. Besides, if ye be harsh in your speeches to them, they will begin to suspect, that ye have no kindness for them, no sympathy with them ; and consequently, they will disregard al-

most every thing that you say to them. Job, in answer to the severe speeches of his three friends, said to them, " Miserable comforters are ye all. If your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake my head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief<sup>1</sup>." The enemies of Messiah are, in ancient prophecy, thus characterized: " They talk to the grief of those, whom thou hast wounded<sup>k</sup>." Let not the behaviour of your dejected friends, then, provoke you at any time, to anger against them; nor let any of their expressions, ever make you speak passionately or harshly, to them.

8. Believe that, their griefs and fears *are such, as they say* that they are. When you talk with them, believe that, their words are a true expression of their thoughts and feelings; and do not contradict them. Be not so cruel as to say, in answer to any of their doleful complaints, as some have said; ' It is but a mere whim, an odd freak, a strange fancy.' If it is but a fancy, a distempered imagination is, at least, as real, and as grievous an affliction, as any other calamity; and the persons afflicted with it, require, at least, to be treated with as tender sympathy, as they do, who are under any other, how great soever it may be. Do not think that they affect to be more sad, than they really are. They are under such perturbation of spirit, that they need not, and will not, and cannot, counterfeit any more sadness or anguish, than that which they already feel. If you do not

<sup>1</sup> Job xvi. 2, 4, 5.

<sup>k</sup> Ps. lxix. 26.

appear to them, to credit what they say ; it will not be in their power to believe, that your concern for them, or sympathy with them, is real. And when they find that it is to no purpose, to disclose the anguish of their souls to you, they will suppress it ; and then, it will overwhelm them, and so increase the disease of their natural spirits. If then, you have the smallest desire, to be instrumental in relieving your afflicted friends, do not disbelieve, nor contradict them ; but shew them invariably, that you believe their doleful complaints, to be true expressions of the anguish which they feel.

9. Study as far as, consistently with a good-conscience, ye can, *to please* them in every thing, and *not* to do, nor say, any thing that may *displease* them. To irritate them, will but disquiet and perplex them the more, and so will increase their distemper ; whereas, to please them in every thing, and in every way possible, will be one of the most effectual means of curing them. If you know what it is that, in any degree, disgusts them, let it be removed without delay ; and if you can conscientiously do, or say, or afford, any thing which ye know would gratify them, do not withhold it from them. This indeed will not be an easy task : for to be gloomy, or apt frequently to be displeased, forms no small part of their distemper. But you ought carefully to study it : for if ye could frequently please them, it might, by the Divine blessing, be a mean of arresting the progress of their doleful malady, if not, of removing it in process of time altogether.

10. Do not *press* them to do any thing which,

their grievous distemper renders them *unable* to do. They are under great depression, and anguish of spirit, and are continually full of perplexing thoughts. It would then be very unkind, and even cruel, to urge them vehemently, to do any thing which requires exertion of mind, or intenseness of thought. If you importune or press them, to do that which, in their present condition, they are no more capable of performing, than a man whose bones are broken, is, of running a race, or of walking under a burden; ye will thereby, throw them into still deeper perturbation of spirit, and this will increase their malady. If the distemper has not yet advanced far, you may indeed, if necessary, often exhort them to do any thing that can easily be done, and to engage in the exercises of social and public worship; but even this must be done, not in a peremptory, but in a gentle and affectionate manner.

11. At the same time, do not if possible suffer them to be *habitually idle, or to be long alone*. Endeavour, with loving and mild importunity, to allure them to some agreeable and easy *task*; such as will exercise the body, and yet not require exertion of mind. This will contribute, not only to strengthen the body, but, in some degree, to withdraw the attention of the mind, from its disquieting thoughts. Do not permit them to remain for a long time, *alone*, especially, if their doleful malady appears to be increasing; but study to procure suitable company for them. Do also all that you can, to prevent them from reading such books as may discourage, or alarm, or terrify them; and from reading any book long at a time.

12. To conclude: choose such a Physician for them, as is *eminently skilled* in curing the disease of melancholy; and, at the same time, is *prudent and cautious*. If one can be found, who has himself, in any degree, been afflicted with that grievous malady, and who has, by the blessing of God, cured some who had been under it; he should, in preference to any other, be consulted; and his prescriptions and directions ought to be so carefully observed, as even in cases of extremity to force, if it cannot be otherwise attained, the afflicted persons to comply<sup>1</sup>.

FROM what has been advanced in this Chapter, it will, I hope, be obvious to the intelligent and candid reader, that true religion is *neither the cause, nor the effect* of melancholy.

It cannot be the *cause* of melancholy; for many have been, and many are, truly religious, who have never appeared, in the smallest degree, to be under the disease of melancholy. Were genuine religion the cause of melancholy, it would undoubtedly have been so, in the case of all, who have exhibited satisfactory evidences of their godly sincerity. Every religious man, would inevitably be afflicted with that dreadful malady; yea, he would be oppressed with it, usually in the very degree, in which he is religious. But so far is this from being the case, that, on the contrary, instances not a few have been found of persons, whom, pure religion

<sup>1</sup> For several of these Advices, I have been indebted to MR TIMOTHY ROGERS' Preface to his Discourse on Trouble of Mind, and Melancholy.

has most effectually *cured* even of deep melancholy. Peace with God, and peace of conscience; together with the exercise of supreme love to God, have, in many instances, removed deeply-rooted melancholy, and that; after it had resisted all the power of medicines. Joy and peace in believing have, by the Divine blessing, often effected the cure, without the help of medicines; especially in those cases in which, the melancholy constitution of the body, had been produced by trouble of mind. True religion, then, when it has its due effect upon the heart, is so far from being the cause, that it is the *best cure*, of melancholy.

As religion is not the cause, so neither is it the *effect* of melancholy. Were true religion the effect of melancholy, every melancholy man would become truly religious, and his degree of genuine religion, would be in exact proportion to his degree of melancholy; so that, the more afflicted with that direful malady, he were, the more joy and peace in believing, and the more love to God, and delight in him, would he at the same time experience. But instead of this, it appears in fact, that the greater number of those who are under the disease of melancholy, consists of persons who are entire strangers, yea, and some of them avowed enemies, to true religion. Faith, holiness, and spiritual comfort, which constitute real religion, are so far from being the effects of melancholy, that the disease of melancholy is, in itself, a great hinderance to them. It is true that, the Lord may render this dreadful malady, subservient to faith, holiness, and comfort, as he sometimes doth, legal terror; but both the one and the

other are, in *themselves*, obstructions to them. Melancholy, indeed, effects slavish fears, legal terrors, and endless scruples; but these constitute no part of pure religion: for, in proportion as religion is increased, in the heart and life of the believer, these are diminished. To say then, either that, genuine religion makes persons melancholy, or that, melancholy renders people truly religious; is to utter an ignorant, and an impudent slander, against our holy religion. No man who has the smallest experience of Godliness, can deliberately reproach it in that manner. Some of the saints, it is granted, are sometimes melancholy; but this is not, because they are religious; but either, because they find, that they have too little of religion, or, because they fear, that they have none at all. Melancholy, therefore, instead of being styled, *religious*, should rather, I humbly apprehend, be termed, *superstitious* melancholy: for while, this distemper makes no man truly religious, it has a direct tendency to render all who are afflicted with it, whether they be converted, or unconverted, *superstitious*<sup>m</sup>.

Hence, the devout reader may also learn that, so much doth the direful disease of melancholy, weaken the mind of a holy man, while he is under it; that he not only cannot, but *will not*, be sensible of joy, or of any other grace in himself. So far as that doleful malady prevails, it renders him sullen, and averse from seeing, or feeling, or attending to, any thing which might afford him comfort. It makes him willing to despond, and unwilling to

<sup>m</sup> See HENRY on the Pleasantness of a religious life, p. 50.



hope, or to rejoice. The consequence commonly is, that he makes it his main study, to raise doubts in himself, to frame objections against himself, and so to help forward his own affliction. Whatever grounds of consolation, he reads or hears of, he disregards; and he spends his time in starting objections against himself, which he is as unwilling, as he is unable, to answer. He has the principle and habit of faith, of love, of joy, and of every other grace, in his soul; but he perceives them not, because he will not perceive them. His views are dark and gloomy. His feelings and exercises, are much tainted by the disease of his natural spirits; and his imagination and mind, are more susceptible, at that, than at any other time, of impressions from the powers of darkness. No sooner does his imagination become distempered, by an alteration in the motion of his nervous spirits, than this mysterious distemper, in addition to the corruption that remains in the imagination, affords Satan an avenue, for assaulting him with the most terrifying of his temptations. Immediately, that infernal enemy pours in, like a torrent, blackness of darkness, frightful illusions, and distracting terrors; so that, the dejected Christian becomes a terror to himself. Oh! what anguish, what horror, fill his soul, when Satan is permitted, by means of that malady, thus to tyrannize over him! How dreadful is this distemper, which leaves the imagination so exposed to that merciless enemy, and which enfeebles the mind, and impairs the judgment, to such a degree; that the Christian, whilst he is feeling the deepest anguish of spirit, is at the same time, unwilling

to receive that consolation, which is freely offered to him, and which only can relieve him ! If he can take pleasure in any thing, it is in solitariness and darkness, in sadness and wailing. The mysterious distemper, under which he labours, turns fancies into realities and realities into fancies, fictions into truths and truths into fictions. It renders every sweet thing, bitter, and every bitter thing, bitter in a ten-fold degree.

Dejected believers may, from what has been said, see what ground they have to hope, that the Lord will not deal with them, according to what they *are*, or to what they *do*, under deep melancholy. God in Christ, is infinitely gracious and merciful ; and he will not consider the inevitable consequents of a direful malady, which none but himself can remove, as sins against him. He will indeed treat believers, according to what they are, and to what they do, when their understanding is sound ; but not, according to what they think, or speak, or do, when their imagination is distempered, and their mind disabled and perplexed. A tender-hearted father, will not be angry with his beloved son, for those injurious expressions and actions, which are the effects of frenzy ; but he will, on the contrary, feel and discover the more tender sympathy with him. Now, “ as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him <sup>a</sup>.” Let no good man then conclude, from his inconsistent and strange behaviour, under the disease of melancholy, that he never was a child of God.

Lastly, However doleful, the distemper of mel-

<sup>a</sup> Ps. ciii. 13.

ancholy is, it is *infinitely more desirable*, even to be a melancholy saint, than a mad sinner. Solomon, who could not be mistaken, informs us, when speaking of unregenerate sinners, that, “madness is in their heart while they live <sup>o</sup>.” Now supposing, (which very seldom happens,) that a holy man should be afflicted with melancholy, all his days; still, it is infinitely less dreadful, to have that dreadful malady affecting the mind, during the short period of human life, and then, followed by endless and ineffable delight; than to have that madness in the heart whilst one lives, which afterwards, will increase into hideous and endless rage. Impenitent sinners, like Saul of Tarsus, are “mad against the saints <sup>p</sup> ;” and “they are mad upon their idols <sup>q</sup>.” The prodigal, under conviction of his sin and misery, is said to have “come to himself <sup>r</sup> ;” which intimates, that hitherto he had been beside himself. Unregenerate men, with respect to the concerns of their souls, are madmen; and all their joys, are but like the pleasant dreams of a man, who has been deprived of his understanding: whereas, those regenerate men, who are under the deepest melancholy, have still the principle and the habit of pure, solid, and everlasting joy.

<sup>o</sup> Eccles. ix. 3.      <sup>p</sup> Acts xxvi. 11.      <sup>q</sup> Jer. l. 38.

<sup>r</sup> Luke xv. 17.

## CHAPTER VI.

OF THE DESIGNS OF GOD, IN PERMITTING SOME OF HIS CHILDREN, TO LOSE THEIR SPIRITUAL COMFORT.

**T**HE throne of the incomprehensible, and only wise God, "is established in righteousness; but it is, at the same time, surrounded "with clouds and thick darkness." "He maketh darkness his pavilion round about him." "His judgments are a great deep:" they are too deep for us to fathom. His counsels are unsearchable, and his ways of providence are past finding out. When, therefore, we would try to penetrate into the mysterious designs, which the infinitely wise God hath, in permitting any of his redeemed, so to lose their spiritual consolation, as to fall under spiritual trouble, and even sometimes under melancholy; it becometh us to do it, with the most profound reverence, and only so far, as the holy Scriptures are our guide. Now from these, we discover that the Lord suffereth believers, to deprive themselves of their sensible comfort, and to continue for a season, under trouble of mind; *not* in order that they may thereby, give the smallest degree of satisfaction to his justice, for their sins. Their Divine Surety hath endured for them, the *whole* punishment due for all their iniquities; and so, hath fully satisfied the offended justice of Jehovah<sup>s</sup>. We also find that, he doth not permit this, from any pleasure that he taketh in their perplexity of soul, consider-

ed merely in itself: for His nature is so infinitely merciful, that he can take no pleasure in their sorrows, considered as disunited from the purposes, intended to be served by them<sup>t</sup>. We likewise discern that, he doth not suffer any of the saints, to fall under depression of spirit, with a view to discourage any unregenerate sinner, from coming to Christ, or from entering upon a holy life: for, saith an apostle, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man<sup>u</sup>."—But, he permit-  
teth them, I humbly apprehend, so to lose their spiritual comfort, as to be disquieted and distressed in spirit, especially for the following purposes:

1. That he may thereby, render them *the more conformable to his beloved Son*, their head and representative in the new covenant. So delighted is Jehovah the Father, with the image of his infinitely dear Son, who, as the second Adam, is the first-born among many brethren; that he hath resolved, that the objects of his redeeming love, shall, as much as possible, consistently with their eternal salvation, be conformed to that image, not only in point of holiness, but of *suffering*. "Whom he did foreknow," says the apostle Paul, "he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren<sup>w</sup>." Now, seeing that the Lord Jesus, in his estate of humiliation in this world, suffered, not only in his body, but in his *soul*; God the Father, hath determined, that the spiritual seed of Christ shall in this world, resemble him, by suf-

<sup>t</sup> Lam. iii. 33. Jer. xxxi. 20. Isa. lxiii. 9.

<sup>u</sup> James i. 13.

<sup>w</sup> Rev. viii. 29.

fering more or less in their souls, as well as in their bodies. As Christ endured in his soul, an awful suspension of Divine consolation, together with a dreadful impression of vindictive wrath ; so believers, in order to resemble him, do sometimes endure the hiding of their heavenly Father's countenance, and the sense of paternal anger, which they often mistake for vindictive wrath.\* Hereby they drink of his cup : they are partakers of his sufferings ; and so are able from experience to say, " As he was, so are we in this world x." For, though they never actually experience, in their trouble of soul, that vindictive wrath, which Christ Jesus felt in his ; yet, by this conformity to him, they have fellowship with him in his sufferings, and attain some small experience of the bitterness of what he endured for them ; and so they learn, the more highly to esteem him, the more ardently to love him, and the more gratefully to remember his immense love to them.

2. He suffers them to lose for a season, their comfort, that he may make them *feel more sensibly, and see more clearly, the deep depravity* of their nature. We read that, Jehovah led the Israelites " through a great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, and where no water was ; that he might humble them, and prove them, to do them good at their latter end," by discovering to them, what was in their hearts y. In like manner, he sometimes withholds his influences of comfort, from believers, and leaveth them for a season, under depression

\* 1 John iv. 17.

y Deut. viii. 15, 16.

of spirit ; in order that he may prove them, and give them, more clear and humbling discoveries of the depth and strength of the corruption, which remaineth in them <sup>a</sup>. The hearts of believers, are like the waters of the sea, which in a calm appear to be clear ; but no sooner does a storm arise and agitate them, than they begin “to cast up mire and dirt.” When Christians are at ease, they sometimes think, that their corruptions are not so strong, and that their graces are not so weak, as they really are: they flatter themselves, that their sanctification is much further advanced, than it actually is. But when their comfort is gone, and their hearts are troubled; what unbelief, what pride, what deadness, what enmity against a holy God, what impatience, what murmuring, what strange unbecoming thoughts of God, arise and appear in their hearts; which they never before, could either feel or believe to be there! Mental trouble serves, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to shew them, how deeply rooted, how inveterate, how malignant, their depravity is; and what reason they have to be greatly ashamed, and to blush, before the omniscient and holy Lord God. It was, upon Job's having been grievously afflicted in spirit, that he discerned more vileness in his heart, than he could formerly have suspected to be in it <sup>a</sup>; and that he learned, deeply to abhor himself as a sinner <sup>b</sup>. There are abominations which, like nests of vipers, lie so quietly within; that believers do not suspect them to be there, till the rod of spiritual trouble, disturbs and arouses them.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.<sup>a</sup> Job xl. 4.<sup>b</sup> Job xlii. 6.

Some corruptions lie so very deep in their hearts, that they can hardly discern them. But as fire under a pot, causes the scum to rise up and run over ; so trouble of mind brings up from the bottom of the heart, such deep corruptions to view, as the most enlightened of the saints, could otherwise, scarcely have conceived to be there : and discoveries especially of *these*, are necessary to deep humiliation of spirit, before the Lord.

3. Another design which God hath, in inflicting trouble of spirit upon some of his children, is, that he may thereby *chasten* them for their sins, and so, *imbitter* sin to them. Disquietude of soul is to believers, a fatherly chastisement. The Lord resolveth thereby to correct them. He determines that, by their bitterness of soul, they shall “ know and see, that it is an evil thing and *bitter*, that they have forsaken Him<sup>c</sup>.” By this most afflictive dispensation, he thus speaketh to each of them ; “ Thy ways and thy doings have procured these things unto thee : this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart<sup>d</sup>.” As the Lord never chasteneth any of his children, but for their profit<sup>e</sup> ; so he never afflicteth them with spiritual trouble, except when it is necessary for that purpose. Accordingly the apostle Peter saith, “ Ye are now for a season, (if *need* be,) in heaviness, through manifold temptations<sup>f</sup>.” By suspending his influences of consolation, from their souls, and so imbittering their sins to them, the Lord weakeneth the remains of corruption in them.

<sup>c</sup> Jer. ii. 19.

<sup>d</sup> Jer. iv. 18.

<sup>e</sup> Hab. xii. 10.

<sup>f</sup> 1 Pet. i. 6.



He thereby, renders them more wise, and circumspect, and so he preventeth much sin, into which, they otherwise would fall<sup>s</sup>. By this painful discipline, their souls are “purified, and made white, and tried;” and so by sad experience, they are made to feel, as well as to see, that their sin is exceeding sinful. By withholding for a season, consolation from them, he shews them, the evil of their not having improved their former comfort well; of their having made for themselves, a saviour of their pleasant frames, by relying on them, rather than on Jesus Christ. By permitting distrust and despondency to prevail against them, and so to occasion much trouble and perplexity of mind to them; he teaches them, the exceeding sinfulness of their unbelief and distrust. His design in hiding his face from them, is, to teach them that they did wrong in setting a small value upon his favour, and the light of his countenance. If he layeth them under a painful sense of his anger, it is, to make them sensible of their folly, as well as ingratitude, in provoking his displeasure. By piercing their hearts with deep sorrow, he teaches them, the sinfulness of their having pierced his beloved Son, and grieved his Holy Spirit. If he maketh them experience the terror of his vindictive wrath, or the dread of suffering, through eternity, the pains of hell: it is to teach them, the extreme folly of their not having been afraid of sinning against him. One part of his design, in suffering his fiery law, to re-enter and distress their consciences, is, to make them deeply sensible of

the great evil of their legal spirit. By permitting them for a time, to lose sight of their evidences of grace ; he teaches them, that they ought never to be proud of their attainments in religion, nor to trust in grace received. If he appears not to stand in the relation of a Father, to them, it is to render them more sensible, that they have not acted the part of obedient children, to him. By seeming to shut out their prayers, he reproves them, for restraining prayer, and for their unbelieving, wandering, and vain thoughts in prayer. When he permits them to be afraid, that they are yet under the dominion of spiritual death ; it is to teach them, the great evil of deadness and coldness of heart, in their acts of worship. If he denies them, his reviving and consoling presence, in reading and hearing his blessed word ; it is to make them deeply sensible of the sinfulness, of their having despised his glorious gospel. And if he leaveth any of them, to fall into some gross and open sin ; his design may be to chasten them, for having suffered themselves to commit secret iniquity. By thus chastening them, the Lord *instructeth* them in the exceeding sinfulness of their sin<sup>h</sup> ; in order that, they may so bewail and abhor it, as to turn with fuller determination of heart from it, to Him as their gracious God and Father. Hereby he also teaches them, that if he leave them but for a single moment, they will instantly fall, even into the most atrocious crimes. Ah ! how deep, how inveterate,

<sup>h</sup> *Chastening* and *instructing* are, both in the *Hebr* *u*, and in the *Greck*, expressed by one word.

is their disease, when a potion so bitter, is requisite to accomplish their cure !

4. The Lord withholds consolation from some of his people, and suffers them for a season, to walk in darkness, in order<sup>f</sup> to *try and exercise their graces*. Hereby the graces of the Spirit in them, are tried or proved, and their truth, as well as their weakness or strength, is manifested to them. "Now for a season," says the apostle Peter, "ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>." No affliction is so grievous and so trying, as spiritual distress. The Lord therefore inflicteth spiritual trouble, sometimes, upon believers, in order that he may try their faith and other graces, and so discover these to them. It appears to have been one of the designs of Job's spiritual trouble, to try, and so to manifest to himself and others, the strong faith, and the invincible patience, which God had given him. There are some graces in the heart of a holy man, which are discovered more clearly to him, by means of spiritual trouble, than of any external affliction. When he finds that he has been enabled, to trust in the Lord Jesus, at the very time in which, he was frowning upon him, and seeming even to slay him; to love him for Himself, when he had no reviving sense of his love to him; and to follow him with longings and prayers, in the midst of darkness and discouragement;

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet..i. 6, 7.

this is afterwards a clear proof to him, of the reality of these graces in his soul. Trouble of mind, during its continuance, renders the exercise of graces, and the performance of duties, peculiarly difficult. If believers, then, when they are under spiritual distress, continue still to cleave in some degree, to God in Christ, and so to love him, as to prefer Him before every other object of affection, even when he seemeth to be casting off their souls, and to be shutting out their prayers; this, when they afterwards reflect upon it, will be an evidence to them, that they are sincere, and that their love to him is supreme. Moreover, when they are enabled, under that most grievous trial, to exercise in some degree, their graces; those graces, are not *only* manifested to their consciences, but are *strengthened* and increased, by their exercise of them. The same affliction that serves, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to try and discover their graces, serves also to excite them to exercise; and the more they are exercised, the more the habit of them is strengthened. When the Lord thus chasteneth any of his dear children, it is invariably for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness. For this "chastening, though for the present, it is not joyous, but grievous," exceedingly grievous; "nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, to them who are exercised thereby\*." It supplies them, in the mean time, with special occasions, for striving and wrestling against their spiritual enemies, for swimming against the stream, for pressing on as through an opposing

\* Heb. xii. 10, 11.

crowd ; and thus, their graces have special opportunities afforded them, of becoming stronger by frequent exercise. It affords occasion, for many actings of faith and love, of repentance and reanation ; and for many ardent longings, and heavenly breathings, which otherwise would not, perhaps, be experienced. Besides, the exercise of the graces of his Holy Spirit in believers, especially of that grace in which, each of them excels, is so pleasing to the Lord ; that he will on no account, suffer them to want occasion, nay, frequent occasion, for such exercise<sup>1</sup>.

5. His design also in withholding consolation, is, to teach them by experience, their *continual need* of living upon Christ by faith ; and so, to render *Him the more precious* to them. “ I will leave in the midst of thee,” saith Jehovah, “ an *afflicted and poor* people ; and they shall trust in the name of the Lord<sup>m</sup>.” Paul and Timothy, “ had the sentence of death in themselves, that they should not trust in themselves, but in God who raiseth the dead<sup>n</sup>.” It is not enough, that the saints merely believe their need, every moment, of fresh supplies of grace from the fulness of Christ : they must be made to *see* and to *feel* that need. Nor is it sufficient for them, merely to believe that it is their duty, at all times, to trust in him for those supplies : they must be made to see clearly, and to feel deeply, their extreme need to do so. They must, by experience, be made deeply sensible that, without a fresh supply of grace at the time, they

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlvii. 11. Song ii. 14. and iv. 9.

<sup>m</sup> Zeph. iii. 12. <sup>n</sup> 2 Cor. i. 9.

are as unable to perform spiritually a single duty, as they were, even in their unregenerate state°. So very unwilling are they, to believe this, and to regulate their spiritual exercise according to it; that for ordinary, they must be trained up to it by sad experience. Now the Lord suspendeth influences of comfort, from many of them, and for a season, inflicteth upon them, a greater or less degree of mental trouble; in order to make them see and feel, how much need they have at all times, to trust in Christ, for continued supplies from his fulness; and to render them deeply sensible, that they cannot otherwise, perform even the least degree of acceptable obedience, than by trusting solely and firmly in Him, for new communications of sanctifying grace, to enable them to perform it. To trust daily, and with unsuspecting confidence, in the great Trustee of the new covenant, that he will, by his Holy Spirit, “work in them, both to *will* and to *do*,” is of such necessity and importance to their growing in grace; that, rather than leave them ignorant thereof, God will teach his children, even by discipline, the most painful, how needful it is to do so. He will permit them to feel, what anguish of soul, their neglecting the daily exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus, will occasion to them; in order that, he may reduce them to the happy necessity of placing, at *all* times, the confidence of their hearts in Him only; and that, for comforting, as well as for sanctifying influences. He will imbitter a life of sense to them, that he may dispose them to relish a life of faith. He will make

° John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

them know by experience, what their having trusted in their habits of grace, hath procured for them; that they may discern the exceeding sinfulness of a legal spirit, and see that, without faith, or the daily exercise of direct confidence in the incarnate Redeemer, it will be impossible for them to please him <sup>P</sup>. The death of their sensible comfort, will shew them the necessity of a life of faith. The Lord giveth to many of his saints, frightful discoveries of sin and wrath, in order that, by being shaken, they may learn to rely the firmer on the sure foundation, which he hath laid in Zion <sup>Q</sup>. He hideth himself from them, and delayeth to help them, till they be in extremity; that, they may learn the high and difficult art of living by faith, and not by sight. Living by signs of grace, is most natural and pleasing to them; but living by faith, is most acceptable to Him. The sight of their evidences of grace, indeed, cannot fail to be delightful to them; but the sight of Jesus, by faith, ought to be a thousand times more delightful. But when they pore so much and so long, upon their evidences, as to be thereby, prevented from direct and frequent actings of trust in the Saviour, they so far dishonour and displease him. When they build their comfort and hope, upon their evidences, instead of building all their comfort, and all their hope, upon Him; they at once, greatly dishonour him, and deeply injure themselves. Thus they render it necessary, that he hide his face, cloud their evidences, and wither their comforts; in order that they may learn, to prefer

<sup>P</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

<sup>Q</sup> Isa. xxviii. 16.

himself before their clearest evidences, and their liveliest frames; to set a higher value upon the husband of their souls Himself, than upon the braceleets and jewels, which they receive from him; and that they may study the art, in the absence of evidences and frames, of living above them, upon himself, who is their life and consolation, their hope and ALL IN ALL. In this manner, he wisely and graciously trains them up, to trust as sinners in himself; to rely on him, not as felt by them, but as *offered* to them; to depend on him *only*; and to stay upon him as theirs in the gospel-offer, when feelings and comforts fail them<sup>r</sup>. As nothing done by believers, glorifies the great Redeemer so much, as their acting of particular trust in him, for salvation; so, if necessary, he will rather hide every other object of confidence from their view, than suffer them to continue resting on it, instead of trusting in Him<sup>s</sup>. In few words, his grand design is, to render Himself, and his redeeming grace, more precious to them; to shew them experimentally, that none can calm the tumults of a troubled soul, but himself only<sup>t</sup>; and, that without Him, they can do nothing that is spiritually good<sup>u</sup>.

6. Another end, which the Lord proposeth to himself, in afflicting believers with trouble of mind, is, that they may be stirred up to *search the Scriptures, more earnestly, and more frequently*: it is, to make them capable of relishing, and of esteeming his glorious gospel, the more. One great design of the doctrines and promises of sacred Scripture, is,

<sup>r</sup> Isa. l. 10. Ps. xlii. 11. Song viii. 5      <sup>s</sup> Ps xlii. 4, 5.

<sup>t</sup> Isa. lvii. 19.

<sup>u</sup> John xv. 5.



to comfort the saints under their manifold afflictions. Accordingly, the most part of the precious promises, is adapted and made to them, considered as in circumstances of trouble: for, although they assent to the truth of them; yet they cannot, so well and so feelingly, experience the suitableness and sweetness of them, unless they are, sometimes, brought into the circumstances to which they refer. The Lord saith, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee"; "I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him"; "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him, and to his mourners". Now, till the day of trouble come, believers do not know by experience, either the use or the value, of such promises as these; because they are not in the condition, to which they relate. Were they to continue long without affliction, and especially, without some degree of spiritual trouble, they would, at least many of them would, be but slightly affected with the doctrines and promises of the gospel; because they could not feel their need of that consolation, which many of these are designed to afford. If they had no burthens to weigh them down, no fears to disquiet them, no distress of conscience to exercise them; much of the good word of God, would comparatively be of little use to them. Without such trouble in a greater or less degree, the saints could not have an opportunity of experiencing the truth, suitableness, and sweetness, of many of the promises: they could not feel the need, nor understand the true meaning, of a great part of the

<sup>w</sup> Ps. l. 15.

<sup>x</sup> Ps. xci. 15.

<sup>y</sup> Isa. lvii. 18.

Bible. Indeed, were believers always triumphing, in the unmingled light of God's countenance; they should thereby, as one expresses it, 'be cut off from half of the promises of the gospel.' In order, then, that they may feel their need of *all* the declarations, and promises of the blessed gospel; and so, be trained up to set such an high value upon the Scriptures, as to search them carefully, and diligently; the Lord permits them, sometimes, to fall under distress of mind. At those times, a sense of need urges them to look eagerly, and frequently, into his blessed word; in order to see if there are any doctrines, or directions, or promises, in it, suited to revive their drooping spirits, or to console their disquieted souls. And when they find, as they sooner or later shall do, any passages of it, which through grace afford direction, or consolation, to their troubled souls; each of them will from experience be able, with the holy Psalmist, to say, "This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me <sup>2</sup>." "Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors <sup>a</sup>." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might *learn* thy statutes <sup>b</sup>."

7. God inflicteth trouble of spirit, upon many of his children, to the end that, by supporting them under it, and delivering them from it, he may the more effectually *recommend to them, the infinite suitableness, riches, and freeness*, of his redeeming grace. It is impossible for a man, who has never experienced in any degree, the distress of a wounded conscience, highly to esteem and admire the

<sup>a</sup> Ps. cxix. 50.    <sup>a</sup> Ps. cxix. 24.    <sup>b</sup> Ps. cxix. 71.

grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only, when his conscience hath been distressed by a galling sense of guilt, and his soul been troubled with a fear of deserved wrath, as well as renewed by the Holy Spirit; that he can eagerly desire, and cordially embrace, the promises of redeeming mercy, or see the inestimable value of super-abounding grace. One of the designs of God, therefore, in laying any of his people in the depths of spiritual trouble, is, that they may in their deliverance, see what reason they have, highly to prize, and gratefully to adore, the transcendent riches and freeness of his glorious grace; that when they are delivered from "the sorrows of death, which compassed them, and from the pains of hell, which got hold upon them;" each of them may from experience, be able to say, with the Psalmist, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." When, in their deliverance, believers are made to see that, from the thickest darkness, the Lord hath brought them forth to the light; that, he hath overruled the greatest evils in their hearts, for good to them; that, when they were bleeding inwardly, and when no man, nor angel, could afford them relief, he kept them from bleeding to death; that, after they had been hearing the tremendous thunders of his fiery law, he hath caused them to hear

for themselves, the reviving sound of his gospel ; that, after they had been at the very mouth of hell, and had, as it were, been smelling the fire and brimstone, he hath exalted them to the hope of heaven ; that, notwithstanding their distrustful and hard thoughts of him, he hath been gracious to them ; that, after they had been very undutiful to him, he hath been kind and compassionate to them ; that, after they had, by their desponding fears, reflected much dishonour upon him, he hath caused their souls to hope in his mercy ; and that, after they had been sinking in the waters of trouble, he hath set their feet upon a rock, and filled them with joy and peace in believing : when, I say, they are made to experience so great a deliverance, they cannot fail to be deeply affected with the sovereignty, the riches, and the freeness of redeeming grace. One design of God, then, in the infliction of mental distress, upon any of his saints, and afterwards in delivering them from it is, to afford them special opportunities of esteeming, admiring, and adoring, his immense love, and boundless grace to them. Hereby, his glorious method of salvation by Jesus Christ, is exceedingly endeared to their souls.

8. Another end which the Lord hath, in permitting some of the saints so to lose their spiritual comfort, as to be disquieted in spirit, is, that thereby, he may rouse them to *greater diligence in watching and praying.*

Disquietment of soul serves, in the hand of the Holy Spirit, to stir them up to *greater watchfulness.* A man who walks in the dark, finds it necessary to be the more careful, where, and how, he

treads. To be lifted up, and cast down; to be emptied, as it were, from vessel to vessel, is of great utility to excite believers to be always watchful.

By these means, the Lord also rouseth them to *pray* more earnestly, and more frequently. Accordingly, Heman, when he was in his deep distress of soul, was much employed in prayer. "O Lord God of my salvation, saith he, I have cried day and night before thee<sup>d</sup>." So was David: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled: I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication<sup>e</sup>." "I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble, when my spirit was overwhelmed within me<sup>f</sup>." And Hezekiah likewise: "O Lord, I am oppressed: undertake for me<sup>g</sup>." And Jonah: "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy Temple<sup>h</sup>." It was not, until Peter was beginning to sink in the sea, that he cried, "Lord save me<sup>i</sup>." There are, I believe, more prayers in the writings of David and of Jeremiah, than in any other parts of the sacred Volume. Indeed, many of the saints, would not be so frequently on their knees, as they are, if trouble of spirit did not weigh them down. This, then, is one of the Lord's designs in going away, that believers may pursue after him. And he will never so hide himself from them, as to render it impossible for them to find him; nor will he depart any faster or farther, than he will enable them so to follow, as to

<sup>d</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 1.

<sup>e</sup> Ps. xxx. 7, 8.

<sup>f</sup> Ps. cxlii. 2, 3.

<sup>g</sup> Isa. xxxviii. 14.

<sup>h</sup> Jonah ii. 7.

<sup>i</sup> Matth. xiv. 30.

overtake him <sup>k</sup>. A long continuance of ease, has a tendency to render them cold and formal in prayer, especially in *secret* prayer ; but spiritual troubles, and painful changes, tend to rouse their spirits, and impel them to “ seek the Lord and his face,” with greater earnestness and importunity : for it is then, especially, that they deeply feel their want of that help, which He only can afford to them.

9. Many of the saints, are afflicted with trouble of mind, to the end that they may thereby, be *the more prepared for spiritual comfort*, and that their consolation, in time to come, may be *the greater*. Sometimes, the Lord inflicteth spiritual distress upon many of his children, in order that, he may afterwards give them the more comfort, and that, their comfort may be the more pure, sweet, and solid. He inflicteth it, in order to prepare them for that strong consolation, which he hath designed for them ; to make them relish and value it the more, and be the more solicitous to possess and retain it. When the church, after Christ had withdrawn himself and departed, found him again, “ she held him, and would not let him go <sup>l</sup>.” As a tree, by being shaken with the stormy wind, is the more deeply and strongly rooted in the ground ; so believers are, sometimes, “ tossed as with tempest, and not comforted <sup>m</sup>,” that they may by faith, cleave the more closely to Christ, and thereby derive the more strength and consolation from his fulness : for the more, they “ continue in the faith, grounded and settled,” the greater, will their peace

<sup>k</sup> Ps. lxiii. 8.

<sup>l</sup> Song iii. 4.

<sup>m</sup> Isa. liv. 11.

and their comfort be <sup>a</sup>. Moreover, when the Lord, by the witnessing of his Spirit, assures them that they have been enabled to love him, even when he seemed to be hating them; and with lamentation and desire, to follow after him, when he appeared to be going away from them; such a clear evidence of the truth of grace in them as that, cannot fail to yield a pleasing satisfaction to their souls. It is the manner of the Lord Jesus, to empty the souls of his children, that he may fill them; to cast them down, that he may lift them up; to trouble them, that he may the more effectually comfort them; and to take away from them, a smaller degree of mental serenity, that he may prepare room in their souls, for a greater measure of pure consolation<sup>o</sup>. He commonly suffers the bitter waters of trouble, to swell; in order that the sweet waters of holy consolation, may afterwards rise higher than ever, in their souls. Inward trouble is, in his hand, a mean of enlarging the capacity of the holy soul; and the more capable that soul is, of comfort, the more consolation is poured into it. Heaviness of spirit also humbleth such a soul; and true humility is, as it were, the vessel into which, the wine of consolation is poured. A humble spirit is a deep spirit, and the deeper the spirit is, it is fitted to contain the more consolation. Besides, as food is doubly sweet after hunger, and light, after darkness; so is consolation, after anguish of spirit. By their want of spiritual comfort for a season, the Lord teacheth his people, to know more of the value of it; and when they learn

<sup>a</sup> Isa. xxvi. 3.<sup>o</sup> Ps. lxxi. 20, 21, 23.

to prize it, and to trust constantly and solely in the great Redeemer for it, as a part of their salvation, the more of it shall they receive.

10. Another design of God, in laying some of his children, in the depths of spiritual trouble, is, to render them *the more compassionate* toward other saints around them, when they see them depressed in spirit. As no outward affliction, how painful soever it may be, is so dreadful and overwhelming, as anguish of spirit is; so, if it is the duty of a Christian, to shew compassion to such fellow-Christians as are under the former; much more ought one, to shew pity to such of them as are under the latter. Surely, the most tender compassion from fellow-saints, is due to those who have “the arrows of the Almighty within them, the poison of which, is drinking up their spirits.” Such perplexing distress, calls aloud for the greatest sympathy, the tenderest pity; as that of Job did, from his friends. “Have pity upon me, said he, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me.” Those Christians are deeply wounded in their spirits; and such wounds, require to be touched with a tender, as well as with a skilful hand. But none of their fellow-Christians, are so well qualified, to treat them with gentleness and tenderness, or to speak to them with mildness and pity, as they who were themselves, in the same doleful condition, and have been mercifully delivered from it. The Lord then, permitteth some of his saints so to lose their comfort, as to become disquieted in spirit; in order to render them the



more compassionate, toward others of their brethren who are in spiritual trouble; and also, the more capable, as well as desirous, of being instrumental in binding up their wounds, with a tender heart, and with a gentle hand. In that way, he teacheth them most effectually, to “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, and meekness,” toward such as are in any trouble, especially in mental trouble; and so, he qualifies them to be merciful and helpful to such.

Moreover, in inflicting upon some of the saints, a painful sense of his anger, the Lord may also have it in view, to teach them so to pity *unregenerate* sinners around them, as willingly to seize every fit opportunity, of instructing them in the way of salvation<sup>9</sup>; and of labouring, from their own experience of the terror of the Lord, to persuade them to flee speedily from sin, and from the tremendous wrath due for sin, to the compassionate Saviour for salvation. Those of the saints who have been in trouble of mind, can, from the anguish and terror, which they themselves have experienced, feel a compassionate and a deep concern for the dreadful condition of secure sinners; and can say more than others can, to assure them, that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

11. The Lord also permitteth some believers, so to forfeit their comfort, as to fall under depression of spirit, in order to qualify them *for speaking comfortably* to others of them, in a similar condition. As a humble, patient, and compassionate spirit is, perhaps, not attainable by any other means; so

<sup>9</sup> Ps. li. 12, 13.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 31.

neither are readiness and skill, in comforting them who are cast down. They, who have been led through the depths of dejection and temptation, are better acquainted, than other Christians are, with the various griefs, fears, perplexities, and conflicts, of the heart in those depths; and therefore they know better, "how to speak a word in season to them who are weary." They have had experience of great and sore trouble, of being supported under it, and afterwards, of being comforted with deliverance from it. The Lord therefore casteth some, yea many, of the saints down, and in a little, raiseth them up again; that they may learn from experience, not only to pity, but, with meekness of wisdom, to comfort others of them, who are cast down. The apostle Paul, accordingly, "was troubled on every side," cast down, and then comforted; in order that, he might attain eminent skill in comforting other saints. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," says he, "who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort, wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation;...or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." The Lord hath work for some of his children to do, which none of them can perform so well, as they who are *thus* qualified for it. He hath sin sick souls to be visited and healed, tempted souls to be relieved, drooping spirits to be revived, weak hands to be strengthened, and

feeble knees to be confirmed. It was necessary that, the apostle Peter should have sad experience of his own weakness, in order that, he might be qualified for strengthening his brethren<sup>1</sup>. Besides, as a man under a dangerous malady, will choose rather, to intrust himself to the care of that Physician, who, by having been afflicted with the same distemper, hath much experience of it, than to that of another who never was afflicted with it; so troubled souls will be more attentive to, and more affected by, the advices and encouragements, suggested by that Christian, who speaks to them from his own experience, than by those of any other Christian.

12. It is likewise the intention of God, by that most painful discipline, to *prepare* some of his children, for *special and eminent service* to Him. Some believers continue all their days in a low way, and have neither much trouble, nor much comfort: they experience little distressing fear, and as little joyful hope. These are believers of a lower class. Others again, are raised up aloft, in flashes, and even in raptures, of sensible joy; but they do not perceive distinctly, the objects which are below: various mistakes, and failings, and improprieties, in their mind and conduct, do almost entirely escape their notice. These too are Christians of an inferior rank. But, when the Lord is training up any of his redeemed, for special and eminent service to him, he commonly brings them low, and employs them in deep exercises, and sharp conflicts with motions of sin within, and temptations

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxii. 31, 32.

of Satan, from without. He bringeth them into depths of spiritual trouble, and giveth them deep, humbling, and even frightful, discoveries of the strength and sinfulness of the unbelief, and other abominations, which lie deep in their hearts. He hideth his face from them, and permits their spiritual enemies, frequently to assault them, and sometimes to prevail so against them, as to threaten their eternal destruction. At the same time, he secretly upholds them; and when the design of the dispensation is gained, he comforts them with deliverance. Thus he advances them to higher degrees of experimental knowledge, to more enlarged views of themselves and of Christ, of sin and of holiness, and of the suitableness, riches, and freeness of redeeming grace, than other believers attain. He thereby renders them more intelligent, wise, and humble, more deeply sensible of their infinite obligations to him, more disposed to trust firmly, and at all times, in the Lord Jesus, and more zealous, lively, and active for his glory, than the generality of other believers; and so, he prepares them for special service, and eminent usefulness in their generation. Some think, and indeed it is probable, that Heman was laid in the darkness and the depths, expressed in the lxxxviii. Psalm, in order that, he might be qualified for that eminent station in the Church, to which he was raised. Doubtless, it is in proportion as believers attain deep experience, that they have the capacity, and especially the wisdom, requisite for superior usefulness in the Church of Christ.

13. Another purpose which the Lord hath to serve, by the spiritual trouble of many of his peo-

ple, is, *to encourage and confirm their hope* ; and so to render them the more *lively*, in their exercise of graces, and performance of duties. “ We glory in tribulations also,” says Paul, “ knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, *hope* <sup>u</sup>.” And Jeremiah : “ This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope <sup>w</sup>.” God suffereth some of his dear children, to lose for a season, their tranquillity of mind ; in order that, he may take occasion from their perplexity, to favour them with such experience of his grace and mercy, power and faithfulness, in supporting them under it, in freeing them from it, and in sanctifying it to them ; as also, with such experience of the truth of their faith, and the uprightness of their heart under it, as will encourage, and confirm their hope of eternal life. Although it is not the experience of a holy man, but the righteousness of Christ, and the promises of God, offered to him in the gospel, that are the *foundations* of his hope of salvation ; yet, his past and present experience *encourages* him to hope. Such experience, as is a proof to him of his personal interest in Jesus and his great salvation, worketh hope ; in as much as, it affords him great encouragement, both to expect and to desire complete salvation. His experience also, of deadness of frame and coldness of love, of dejection of mind and sadness of heart, of powerful support under these, and of comfortable deliverance from them ; serves exceedingly, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to make him abound in hope : and the more,

<sup>u</sup> Rom. v. 3, 4.<sup>w</sup> Lam. iii. 21.

he abounds in the delightful exercise of that living hope, which is founded upon the living Redeemer, and which hath for its object, the eternal enjoyment of the living God; the more lively and cheerful, will he be, in all spiritual exercise, and holy obedience. When he reflects that his great Redeemer hath, in his love, and in his pity, delivered him from the greatest of all troubles, and restored to him the joy of his salvation; he is encouraged, yea, and sweetly constrained, to expect from such a Saviour, the greatest blessedness, the highest felicity, of which his nature will, through all eternity, be capable.

14. One end which the Lord may have to accomplish, by inflicting spiritual trouble upon some, is, *the instruction of others* of his children. He seemeth, in his adorable sovereignty and infinite wisdom, to have resolved, that *some* of his redeemed should be afflicted with inward, as well as with outward troubles, for the instruction of the *rest*. By subjecting some, to that most painful discipline, he appears to have determined that others of them, shall thereby learn, the exceeding sinfulness of their own unbelief and other sins; the necessity of trusting simply, cordially, and at all times, in the Lord Jesus, for sanctifying grace; the unspeakable importance of holy comfort, and of constant reliance upon Christ, for the continuance, and increase of it; and the duty of being more thankful to him, for the peace of conscience which they enjoy, as well as of being more circumspect, and more solicitous not to provoke his displeasure. Spiritual trouble seems peculiarly adapted, as an instrument, to convey spiritual and holy instruc-

tion, to the minds of all who believe. Accordingly, the thirty-second, forty-second, and eighty-eighth, Psalms, in which, mental trouble is described, are, each of them, entitled *MASCHIL*, which signifies, *Giving instruction*.

15. Another design which God may have, in afflicting many of the saints for a season, with trouble and terror of conscience, is, to assure wicked men around them, of a *judgment, and of wrath to come*. His intention thereby seems to be, to give assurance to unregenerate sinners, and that, by their very senses, that there shall be a future judgment, in which it shall be ill with the wicked, “seeing the reward of his hands, shall be given him<sup>x</sup> ;” that, “if the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth ; much more the wicked and the sinner<sup>y</sup> ;” and that, “if judgment begins at the house of God,” inexpressibly dreadful, “shall the end be, of them that obey not the gospel of God<sup>z</sup>.” The saints, are the objects of Jehovah’s immense, and unchangeable love : they are unspeakably precious in his sight, and are kept by him, as the apple of his eye. They love him supremely, and study sincerely to please and honour him. Jesus Christ their Divine surety, hath fully satisfied his justice, for all their offences : and yet, he afflicteth many of them in this world, with a grievous, and perplexing *sense* of his anger against them for their sins, and even, with an overwhelming *dread* of his eternal wrath. Now, may it not be partly the intention of God, by thus afflicting many of his own dear children, to shew to uncon-

<sup>x</sup> Isa. iii. 14.

<sup>y</sup> Prov. xi. 31.

<sup>z</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 17.

verted sinners, what a dreadful punishment must be inflicted on them, if they still continue impenitent? Hereby, he affords them evident warning of their danger, before it is too late, and gives them repeated opportunities of making, each of them, this reflection: 'If even God's own children, experience such terror and anguish of soul, when they are only under the mild rod of his fatherly anger, and that, for their *salvation*; how inconceivably more horrible, and intolerable, will the torment of his enemies, and of me in particular, if I continue but a little longer, an enemy to him, be, when we shall lie, through eternal ages, under the unrelenting strokes of his vindictive wrath, for our *destruction*!'

16. Lastly, The Lord inflicteth trouble of spirit, upon many of the saints, on purpose *to manifest his own glory*. To display the glory of God in Christ, is, indeed, the chief and ultimate end of that dispensation, to which, every other end is subordinate. His chief design in inflicting spiritual trouble, is, the manifestation of the infinitely glorious perfections of his nature. Next to that unparalleled display of the glory of his attributes, which hath been made in the sufferings of Christ, their Covenant-head; is, perhaps, the display of it, which is afforded in the sufferings, especially in the mental sufferings, of the members of his mystical body. The glory of his manifold wisdom, shineth illustriously, in devising those circumstances of their mental trouble, which are, of all others, the fittest for subserving the designs of his grace in their sanctification; the glory also of his infinite power, both in supporting them under that great-



est of all afflictions, and then, in delivering them from it; the glory of his holiness, in hiding his face from them, and in laying them, on account of their sins, under dreadful impressions of his anger, even though they still continue to be the objects of his redeeming love; the glory of his justice, in raising them to the full enjoyment of the salvation purchased for them, even by discipline, the most painful, rather than suffering them to come short of it; the glory of his love, grace, and mercy, in dispensing, whenever it is needful, temporary trouble, in order to prevent that eternal torment which they deserve, in mitigating that trouble, and in delivering them from it, as soon as the ends of inflicting it are served; the glory of his faithfulness, in performing the promise of that kind of paternal chastisement, which is the most grievous, rather than leave a single promise, unperformed to them; and, the glory of his sovereignty, in thus afflicting, for their good, whomsoever, whensoever, and in what degree soever, he pleaseth. He displays the glory of his infinite sovereignty, by dispensing to his people, trouble and comfort, sorrow and gladness, just as it pleases him. Upon that ground, Elihu vindicated the Lord's afflicting of Job, without questioning, as Job's other three friends had done, his integrity. "I will answer thee," says he, "that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters<sup>a</sup>." By inflicting mental trouble on some of his saints, the Most High sheweth them, and others around them, what he

<sup>a</sup> Job xxxiii. 12, 13.

*could* do with them, if he would. By so doing, he maketh it manifest that it is HE, “who formeth the light, and createth darkness; who maketh peace, and createth evil<sup>b</sup>.” He thereby makes them deeply sensible, that all their comforts, whether outward or inward, depend as entirely on His sovereign pleasure, as their election and regeneration did.

FROM what has here been said, disconsolate believers may see that, the Lord never withholdeth sensible comfort from them, but when his doing so, is for their good, in subservience to his own glory. Although the loss of spiritual consolation, and the trouble of mind which ensues, are in themselves, discouragements from holy practice, and even obstructions to it; yet, the Lord hath appointed that many of the saints, shall sometimes be afflicted with these, in order that they may in his hand, subserve the designs of his grace, in their sanctification and salvation. Were believers always alike: were they continually in a lively frame: could they invariably exercise ardent love, and sensible joy; they would begin to think that, the power to do so, was inherent, and that it was in a great measure, their own. But when, by means of their want of consolation, they are made deeply sensible that, of themselves they can do nothing, and that, they need to depend continually on Christ, for supplies from his fulness; they are hereby prepared to glorify him, both by trusting in him, and by advancing in conformity to him.

<sup>b</sup> Isa. xlv. 7.

Disconsolate Christian, thou art never laid in the furnace of spiritual trouble, but when it is necessary for thy good. Love therefore thy gracious God and Father, who, in all his dispensations, consults thy welfare; who never chastens thee, but for thy profit, that thou mayest be a partaker of his holiness <sup>c</sup>. “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him <sup>d</sup>.” “For a small moment he hath forsaken thee, but with great mercies will he gather thee <sup>e</sup>.” What is the reason, that the glorious gospel hath often appeared to thee, too plain, to be practically understood, and too good, to be believed with application? It is thy pride, thy self-righteous spirit. Endure then, with faith and patience, that greatest of all afflictions,—distress of mind; for by it, thy heavenly Father is, in answer to thy own earnest prayers, destroying the pride of thy heart.

From the foregoing particulars, exercised Christians may also see that, when outward and inward troubles, at any time, meet upon them, this is no proof, *either that they are unregenerate, or that God is their enemy*. Believer, when thou art under great and sore troubles, Satan will try to persuade thee, that they are proofs of thy hypocrisy; and that if God loved thee, he would never subject thee to such long, complicated, and grievous calamities. The construction, which Job's three friends put upon his complicated, and grievous afflictions, was, that they evidenced him to be a hypocrite, and God to be his enemy. When waters of a full cup, are measured out to thee, do not conclude that God doth

<sup>c</sup> Heb. xii. 10.<sup>d</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 7.<sup>e</sup> Isa. liv. 7.

not love thee, or that thou art not one of his children. For great, as thy distresses are, they are not only consistent with his love to thee, but they proceed from it. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth<sup>f</sup>." Others whom God hath loved, have endured as great troubles as thou, if not greater. Heman suffered terrors, which threatened to overwhelm his amazed soul, and that, not for a short season, but from his youth up; and yet, instead of concluding that God was his enemy, or that He did not love him, he addressed God, as the "Lord God of *his salvation* <sup>g</sup>."

Believers may hence see that, *they have no reason to be offended* at the ways of godliness, on account of any trouble, how grievous soever it may be, which they sometimes endure in those ways. They have no sufficient reason to "be weary, or faint in their minds." Their gracious God and Father, proposeth to himself the best of all ends, in afflicting them; namely, their sanctification, in subordination to his own glory: and they may rest assured, that they shall at no time, be afflicted with any degree, either of inward, or of outward trouble, but what infinite wisdom sees necessary, for attaining those ends. The kind, degree, and continuance of their troubles, are all fixed, by the immutable decree of their heavenly Father, who loveth them; whose wisdom could not have devised less, and whose love could not have appointed more, affliction for them, than is requisite for the purposes of his glory in their salvation. They

<sup>f</sup> Heb. xii. 6.

<sup>g</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 1.

have, therefore, no reason to be displeased with *any* afflictive dispensation ; or to think the worse of His ways of grace and providence, because of any of their sufferings.

Once more: Let every disconsolate Christian *endeavour*, in the diligent use of appointed means, *to have those ends accomplished in him*, for which, the Lord is afflicting him. If he do not know the particular design, which the Lord may more immediately have in view, in visiting him with his present distress of soul ; let him study to have at least, *all* those ends of it gained upon him, which have been explained above. His duty is, to trust firmly in the Lord Jesus, and also to pray frequently, that all the designs which God usually hath, in thus afflicting any of his children, may be obtained upon him. Perhaps, the particular intention of his spiritual trouble, is for a season, concealed from him ; in order that, his heart may be set on having *all* the ends of the Lord, in that most afflictive dispensation, gained upon him. “ It is the glory of God to conceal a thing <sup>b</sup>.” “ Clouds and darkness are round about Him <sup>i</sup>.” And, therefore, though it is the duty of a holy man, to inquire into the Lord's *principal* design in hiding his face from him, that he may in his exercise, strike in with that design ; yet, it becomes him to search into it, with the deepest reverence and humility ; and not to be so disappointed if he succeed not, as to sink lower in depression of mind, or to be deterred from any part of spiritual exercise. On the contrary, he ought, by the frequent exercise of

<sup>b</sup> Prov. xxv. 2.

<sup>i</sup> Ps. xcvi. 2.

every grace, and the diligent performance of every duty, to grow up into Christ in *all things*: and he may warrantably hope that, in proportion as he is enabled to do so, the end, or ends of his mental trouble, will be gained upon him.

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## CHAPTER VII.

OF THE MEANS WHICH, DISCONSOLATE BELIEVERS SHOULD EMPLOY, IN ORDER TO RECOVER THEIR SPIRITUAL COMFORT.

SPIRITUAL consolation is a commodity of heaven, not to be imported, but from that distant and better country. It is God only, the God of all comfort, to whom infinite mercy and power belong; who can impart holy consolation to the sorrowful heart, or pour the balm of peace into the wounded spirit. It is only the adorable Spirit the Comforter, who, like Noah's dove, can fly with the olive-leaf of peace, to assure the troubled soul, "that the winter is past, and that the rain is over and gone." When a holy man is walking in darkness, the day of comfort will not dawn, nor the shadows flee away, till "the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings:" and he can no more command at his pleasure, the rising of the spiritual Sun, within, than he can, that of the natural sun, without. All that he can do is, in the strength of the grace which is in Christ Jesus, to use means of recovering comfort, or, like the mariners in the ship with Paul, to cast anchor, and wish for the day.

The means which he ought to employ for that purpose, must be means of Divine appointment, especially the following:

1. He ought, in humble reliance on the grace of Christ, to *search out, and confess* to his heavenly Father, those *iniquities*, which have provoked Him to hide his face from him. He must without delay resolve, as the Israelitish Church in captivity did, to “search and try his ways, and to turn again to the Lord; until the Lord look down, and behold from heaven <sup>k</sup>.” He ought to imitate David, who, when he was in distress of conscience, said to Jehovah, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is godly, pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found <sup>l</sup>.” One special design of the Lord’s hiding his face, sometimes, from many of his children, is, so to chasten them for some latent sins, in their hearts or lives, as to make them deeply sensible of them, and of the horrible malignity of them; in order that, they may attain deeper humiliation and self-abhorrence. The omniscient eye of God, hath seen all those secret evils, which, either have escaped their own notice altogether, or which, they have carefully concealed from that of others, while they could not but know that they were open to His view; and it hath also beheld, how much, his own glorious majesty, and spotless holiness, have been affronted and insulted by them. Hence are his righteous

<sup>k</sup> Lam. iii. 40, 50.

<sup>l</sup> Ps. xxxii. 5, 6.

Displeasure, and that painful sense of it, under which they languish and mourn<sup>m</sup>. It is their own evil tempers, and especially their unbelief, and self-righteous spirit, that are the principal bars to their enjoyment of holy consolation. When, therefore, they complain of desertion and darkness, they ought to search impartially, and diligently, into the hidden abominations, which have procured for them that anguish of spirit which they feel; to examine strictly their consciences, if some sinful inclination, opinion, or practice, have not been indulged by them. They must listen to the softest whispers of conscience. If conscience report that this hath been neglected, or that hath been done wrong; they ought to trace that report to the grounds of it, and to search even into the deepest recesses of the heart. And when their discovery of lurking depravity, or of secret iniquity, is as deep as they can make it; they should, next, with holy shame, sorrow, and self-abhorrence, make ingenuous and particular confession of that to the Lord<sup>n</sup>.

2. The disconsolate believer must likewise, if he would recover spiritual comfort, study without delay, *to be deeply convinced of the exceeding sinfulness, and hurtfulness, of his sins in general, and especially of his unbelief.* “When the Comforter is come,” saith Jesus Christ, “he will reprove, *or*, convince the world of sin;...of sin, because they *believe not* on me<sup>o</sup> :” He will convince the world of unbelief, as if there was no other sin in the world, to be compared to that. The refusing to believe, or

<sup>m</sup> Isr. lix. 1, 2.<sup>n</sup> Hos. v. 15.<sup>o</sup> John xvi. 8, 9.



trust in the great Redeemer, is the radical evil of the human heart, the principal sin, the most malignant of all sins: and therefore to be truly convinced of the strength, the sinfulness, and the perniciousness, especially of *that* sin, is necessary to the Christian's attaining of holy comfort. Indeed the Spirit of Christ, for ordinary, never restoreth consolation to troubled saints, without previously convincing them, of the exceeding *sinfulness* of their refusing to trust as sinners, in Christ, for all their salvation. When they are under distress of conscience, they commonly see and bewail their other sins; but they still continue, and cannot but continue, to be without comfort, because they do not see that, their not believing with application, the record concerning the Son of God, and that, their not relying with the confidence of their hearts on Him, for salvation to themselves, are the greatest of all their provocations. They cannot be favoured, with true consolation, till they be made deeply sensible, that by their unbelief and distrust, they have done what they could, to make the God of truth a liar <sup>P</sup>. Ah! little do they think, what reproach, what indignity, they have reflected on the infinitely holy and faithful Jehovah, by giving the lie to his immutable veracity! They do not consider that, by refusing or even hesitating, to trust in Jesus the Son of God, for salvation to themselves in particular, they have charged the God of truth with disingenuity and treachery; as if he had said one thing in his word, and intended another in his heart; as if he had not been in earnest, in his of-

<sup>P</sup> 1 John v. 10.

fers of a Saviour and of salvation, to them ; or, as if he had not spoken the truth, and so did not deserve to be trusted. Jehovah sweareth by his life, that he hath no pleasure in their death, but rather, that through the compassionate Saviour, they should turn to him and live. And therefore to doubt after all, that He is not willing to save them, is to charge him, not only with insincerity, but with perjury. The high authority of the great and holy God, is, in a special manner, interposed in his commandment to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. He styleth it, “ His commandment;” as if it had been the only one, that he ever gave to the children of men <sup>a</sup>. Now, disconsolate Christians, by their not believing on the name of his dear Son, do fly in the face of all that sovereign authority. Their presuming, on any pretence whatever, to disobey that *high* command, is a crime of the deepest die. It is more criminal, than even the sin of Adam, in eating of the forbidden fruit: for Adam by so doing, sinned against God, only as a Creator and Preserver ; but they sin against him, not merely as a Creator and Preserver but as a Redeemer. It is more criminal, than the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah <sup>r</sup>. It is even worse than the sin of the Jews, in crucifying the Lord Jesus: for they crucified him, when he was disguised under the form of a servant ; but disconsolate Christians, by refusing to trust in him for salvation, crucify him afresh, after he hath, by his resurrection from the dead, been declared to be the Son of God and the true Messiah <sup>s</sup>. Nay, it is

<sup>a</sup> John.iii. 23.<sup>r</sup> Matth. x. 14, 15.<sup>s</sup> Rom. i. 4.

even more heinous than the sin of devils ; for they never had a Saviour offered to them, nor a commandment given them, to believe in him. Ah ! how inconceivably sinful is it, not to trust for salvation, in the Lord Jesus, the faithful trustee of that everlasting covenant, which is well ordered in all things, and sure ! Alas ! why do not saints shrink with horror, from the first risings of unbelief in them, as they would do, from a temptation to commit murder, or any other enormous crime ? Unbelief is the radical evil of the depraved heart, from which, every other abomination issues.

It is also requisite in order to comfort, that disquieted Christians be deeply convinced of the exceeding *hurtfulness*, of their sins in general, and especially of their unbelief. They must without delay, study to become deeply sensible that, the unbelief which prevails against them, and which passes in their minds, under the disguise of humility, and a dread of presumption, is a most deep, dangerous, and destructive evil. Their unbelief is the source, to which, every other departure of their hearts from the living God, may be traced. It is the principal cause of all their spiritual trouble. What is it, but their distrusting of Christ, and their apprehending of God to be their enemy ; that increases the enmity against him, the deadness of spirit, the hardness of heart, and the indisposition of soul, to meditate on him as a God of grace, and to pray to him, which they feel ? What is it, but their fearing that he doth not love them, and their apprehending that he is laying snares for them, or is watching for evil against them ; that fills their souls with trouble and anguish, terror and dismay,

aversion from him, and weariness in every act of service done to him? Is it not their disbelief of his care, and their distrust of his mercy, that dispose them, to put a dark construction upon his dispensations to them, and to sink even under the slightest pressures! Let the disconsolate Christian, then, assure himself, that he cannot attain holy comfort, until he be convinced that, his refusing to trust as a sinner in Jesus Christ, for salvation to himself, is not only exceedingly *sinful* in the sight of God, but inexpressibly *hurtful* to himself.

3. He should, in order to recover spiritual consolation, take heed that, he do not make *rash and desperate conclusions against himself*, respecting that which is either past, or present, or future. When a holy man concludes rashly, after he has had good evidence of his having been in a state of grace, That he is still in a state of nature, he bears false witness against himself, and reflects dishonour on his faithful Redeemer.

He must, therefore, strive against forming rash and sad conclusions against himself, with respect to that which is *past*. He ought not to conclude that, he never had the grace of God, and that, all his past experience has been but delusion; merely because he is *now* walking in darkness, and is not able to discern the evidences of that grace. He should be much on his guard against thinking that, he never was renewed in the spirit of his mind; or that, he never passed from death to life; because all his former experiences appear now to him, to have been counterfeit. When, under a sense of Divine anger, he rashly calls in question all that the Lord hath done in, and for his soul; this is

a sin which is highly provoking to the Holy Comforter. Asaph seems to have been guilty of it, when his remembrance of God, and of his song in the night, did not lessen his trouble <sup>t</sup>.

Neither ought the disquieted believer, to conclude rashly against himself, with regard to his *present* state. He must take heed, that he do not grieve the Holy Spirit; by concluding that, he hath at present, no true work of grace in his heart, no vital union with Christ, no personal interest in him, or that God is his enemy, and hath utterly cast him off. As the hypocrite is always disposed to hope, upon false grounds, that he is a true believer; so the true believer is frequently disposed, especially if troubled in soul, to fear, upon improper grounds, that he is a hypocrite. The ancient church in her captivity, said, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God <sup>u</sup>." Jonah likewise said, "I am cast out of thy sight <sup>w</sup>:" and David, "I am cut off from before thine eyes <sup>x</sup>." But these and other instances of the same kind, are left on record, not for the believer's imitation, but for his admonition. It is a great sin in a holy man, to deny Christ within him; a sin, of which he must be made deeply sensible, in order to his attainment of pure consolation.

Moreover, he must take heed, that he do not form desperate conclusions against himself, respecting the *future*. He ought to be on his guard against concluding, with respect to his spiritual condition,

<sup>t</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 3, 6.

<sup>w</sup> Jonah ii. 4.

<sup>u</sup> Isa. xl. 27.

<sup>x</sup> Ps. xxxi. 22.

that it will never be better with him. He should tremble at the impious thought, of making this peremptory and desperate conclusion ;—‘the Lord will be favourable to me no more: I shall undoubtedly perish for ever.’ He ought to be aware, even of doubting whether God will be merciful to him, or not ; but much more, of concluding rashly that, He never will have mercy on him. Is he “plagued all day long, and chastened every morning?” He must not hence conclude, that the Lord will never lay aside the rod, nor be favourable any more. There is nothing in the Oracles of God, nothing in the dealings of God with him, and nothing in himself, which can render that conclusion warrantable. The disconsolate Christian, indeed, is often prone, under the influence of temptation, to make such a dismal conclusion ; but let him remember, that it is a very heinous sin to do so<sup>7</sup>. It tends greatly,

<sup>7</sup> It is lamentable to reflect, how ready, some of the saints, when in trouble of mind, have been, to form desperate conclusions, respecting their eternal state ; and thereby, to gratify the tempter, as well as, to reflect much dishonour on redeeming grace : and it is no less wonderful, how often, infinite mercy hath interposed for their support, and even their deliverance, at the very times in which, they have been making such conclusions. I have read the following account of one Mrs *Honeywood*, who lived, more than a Century ago, in England : When she was ‘under deep desertion, she refused all comfort, and seemed to despair utterly of the mercy of God. A worthy Minister being one day with her, and reasoning against her desperate conclusions, she took a Venice-glass off the table, and said, *Sir, I am as sure to be damned, as this glass is to be broken ;* and therewith, threw it forcibly to the ground : but to the astonishment of both, the glass remained whole and sound. The Mi-

to harden his heart, and to strengthen his remaining enmity against the God of his salvation. The saints in Scripture, who had been guilty of that sin, did afterwards bitterly bewail it. When David had said that he was cut off, he informs us that he said it in his haste <sup>2</sup>. After Asaph had expressed the thoughts of his desponding soul, thus; “Will the Lord cast off for ever?” &c. he said, “This is mine infirmity <sup>3</sup>.” The dejected Christian, then, must beware of provoking in a still higher degree, the displeasure of God, by casting away his confidence in the Redeemer, and giving over himself as undone for ever. If, in the darkness of spiritual trouble, he cannot discern evidences of his being in a state of grace; he ought on no ac-

nister, with admiration, took it up, rebuked her presumption; and shewed her, what a wonder, Providence had wrought for her satisfaction. This greatly altered the temper of her mind.’ FLAVEL’S Divine Conduct, &c. p. 291.

\* Mrs *Joan Drake* of Emersham too, in her great temptations, had a custom of turning over the Bible, to put her finger suddenly upon some verse, saying, *Now, whatsoever my finger is upon, is just my case, (whatsoever it be,) and my doom.* But the Lord did so order it, that looking upon the verse, it was always found to be encouraging and comfortable. She was much entreated to desist from that practice; but she begged that, she might be allowed to do it once more, promising faithfully to leave it off: afterwards, being permitted, she opened the Bible, and put her finger upon that excellent text, without looking or reading a word;—“Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord?” &c. Isa. xl. 27. which, being read and considered, so crossed her expectation, that it made her blush.’ CLARK. Exam. Vol. 2. p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxxi. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.

count, rashly to conclude, that he certainly is *not* in that state, much less, that he *never shall* be in it; but leaving, in the mean time, that matter undecided, he should, by the direct actings of faith, intrust to the compassionate Saviour, the whole affair of his eternal salvation: for that is the way to recover in due time, the *joy* of that salvation.

4. He must, for the same purpose, call his soul to a *strict account*, for its dejection and disquietude, and *charge it again and again, to trust in Jesus Christ*, and in God through him.

He ought without delay, to call his troubled soul to *an account*. This was a mean of recovering comfort, which David employed, and which he did not employ in vain. When his soul was cast down, and disquieted in him, he called upon it to give an account of itself: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me<sup>b</sup>?” The grief of holy David, was not without a cause; and yet, it must not be obstinate, nor exceed due bounds. It must not continue to depress and disquiet his soul; and so to discompose it, as to disqualify it for the spiritual performance of present duty. The disconsolate believer ought, in like manner, to commune with his own heart, and to call upon his soul to assign a sufficient reason, why it suffers itself to be disquieted, and cast down. He should call upon his troubled soul, to answer such questions as these: ‘Is the cause of this dejected, this despondent frame, a just one? Why, O my soul, art thou thus disquieted? What ground hast thou for these perplexing fears? Thou

<sup>b</sup> Ps. xlii. 5.



wilt say, I have good reasons indeed to be troubled, yea, to be so troubled, as to be disqualified for the acceptable performance of every duty. But, hast thou *sufficient* reasons; such reasons, as will endure to be tried, before the awful tribunal of the omniscient and righteous Judge of the world? Have not other believers, as much cause as thou, to be uneasy; who yet, do not yield themselves, as thou dost, to gloomy dejection, and to obstinate grief? Why shouldst thou be cast down, as if thou hadst no grounds of hope or encouragement, in the blessed gospel; as if thou hadst a God without mercy, a Saviour without merit, a Comforter without a right of access to him, and trouble without a promise, either of support under it, or of deliverance from it? Wilt thou be still miserable, and not know why? Why, O my soul, dost thou, by thy despondency and sadness, dishonour thy God and Saviour, injure thyself, and deter others from the way of holiness? Canst thou give a good account of this tumult? Were a holy man but to make strict inquiry, into the grounds of his uneasiness of soul, it would soon, in some happy measure, be lessened. He can at no time, have any *real* ground to be afraid, that the Lord hath, either totally or finally forsaken him.

Moreover, he should frequently *charge* his disquieted soul, to *hope* in the Saviour, and in God through Him. "Hope thou in God," said David to his troubled soul; "for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." After the Christian has urged his soul, to search into the grounds of its disquieting fear, he must next charge it, not to harden itself in sorrow; but on the contrary,

to trust in God; to hope that, it “ will yet praise Him for the help of his countenance;” that is, for his favour, and the comfort of it.

5. If a good man troubled in mind, would recover spiritual comfort, he must labour *to understand, and to consider well, his warrant* as a sinner of mankind, to *trust* in Christ and in God through Him, for complete salvation. When he cannot discern evidences *within* himself, of his having *formerly* believed in Jesus; it would, through grace, relieve his mind much, if he could see a full warrant in the Scripture *without* him, to believe *now* in Him. He should, therefore, in order to attain consolation, consider well, that in the gospel, Christ with his righteousness and fulness, is wholly, freely, and particularly, *offered to him* as a sinner of mankind<sup>c</sup>; that the *calls or invitations* of the gospel to accept all that is offered, are addressed to him<sup>d</sup>; that an authoritative *commandment*, to comply with the invitations, and so to accept the offers, of the gospel, is given him<sup>e</sup>; that *all the promises*, being in Christ, are, in and with Christ, freely offered to him for his acceptance<sup>f</sup>; and, that these promises, and such as these, are in a special manner, given him:—“ Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out<sup>g</sup>.” “ He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved<sup>h</sup>.” “ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved<sup>i</sup>.” He

<sup>c</sup> Exod. xx. 2. Isa. lv. 4. John vi. 32. and iii. 16. 1 John v. 11.

<sup>d</sup> Prov. i. 22, 23. and viii. 4. Isa. lv. 1—3. Matth. xi. 28. Rev. xxii. 17.

<sup>e</sup> Exod. xx. 3. Ps. lxii. 8. Prov. iii. 5. 1 John iii. 23.

<sup>f</sup> 2 Cor. i. 20. Prov. i. 23. Acts ii. 39. Heb. iv. 1.

<sup>g</sup> John vi. 37. <sup>h</sup> Mark xvi. 16. <sup>i</sup> Acts xvi. 31.

ought to know and to consider, that these *four* things, the offer, the invitation, the commandment to believe or trust in Christ, and the promise; being all addressed or directed to him, as a sinner of Adam's race,—form his warrant, or afford him a right, to come as a sinner in himself, and without a moment's delay, to trust firmly in the Lord Jesus for eternal salvation. He should study clearly to understand, that those, being founded on the intrinsical sufficiency of the obedience and death of Christ, for the salvation even of all mankind, afford him, as a sinner of mankind, a sufficient right or warrant, to come as he is; to come with all his sins, all his wants, and all his griefs, and to rely with assured confidence, on that Divine Redeemer, for complete salvation to himself in particular. He ought to understand distinctly, that, as they are all directed as particularly to him, as if there was not another sinner in the world, besides himself; so, they afford to him, a particular, a present, and a sufficient warrant, to confide, for all salvation to himself, in Christ and in God through Him; that they afford to him a full right, not indeed to believe that Christ is *already* his in possession; (his assurance of this, must be founded on evidences;) but—to *trust*, and to trust cordially, that Christ *now giveth* himself, with his righteousness and salvation, to him in possession. He must in order to recover true comfort, learn, spiritually and clearly to understand, that Christ's being his in *offer*, giveth him a right, to trust in him for *possession*.

The disconsolate Christian should likewise, have it firmly settled in his mind and conscience, that, as the great *commandment* to believe on the name of

Jesus Christ, forms a main part of his revealed warrant to trust in Him, so it makes it *his duty* to trust in him; and that, if it is his duty to trust in him for salvation, it cannot at the same time, be his sin. He must labour to be fully persuaded, that his endeavouring to trust cordially and confidently, in the Lord Jesus for all his salvation, is not presumption or a sin; but, that it is his present duty, yea, his first, his principal, his greatest duty, without the performance of which, it will be impossible for him, to please God in any other duty<sup>k</sup>. It cannot, surely, be presumption in him, to do that which God commandeth. Could the disquieted Christian be but convinced that, his distrust of the great Redeemer, is his chief, his greatest sin, the source of all his other sins; and that, his trusting in Him for salvation to himself, is his first duty, the principal of all his duties; it would be a sure step, toward his attaining of holy consolation. O that he but knew, what an unspeakable comfort it is, that the God of all consolation hath made it *his duty*, his first duty, to trust at all times, in the infinitely compassionate Saviour! O that he would instantly and frequently try, to place the confidence of his heart, in Him for salvation; and not stop a moment to look into himself, for any good qualification, to add to, or to strengthen that warrant for doing so, which the Lord hath graciously afforded him in his holy word!

6. He should also, in order to attain consolation, consider *the encouragements* which he still hath, to trust in the blessed Redeemer. Those

<sup>k</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

things mentioned above, which afford the disconsolate Christian, in common with all the other hearers of the gospel, a warrant, give him at the same time, an encouragement, to rely with confidence on the Lord Jesus. But there are various other things which, though they, strictly speaking, form no part of his revealed warrant; yet serve greatly, when he properly considers them, to *encourage* him to trust in the Saviour. These are,—The infinitely gracious and merciful nature of God in Christ; the consummate righteousness of the Lord Jesus<sup>1</sup>; the infinite fulness of grace which is in Him, and that, for the chief of sinners<sup>m</sup>; the plenteous redemption which is with him<sup>n</sup>; the forgiveness of iniquity, which is dispensed by him<sup>o</sup>; the absolute promises of his gracious covenant<sup>p</sup>; his infinite ability and willingness to save, even the chief of sinners<sup>q</sup>; his intercession for the transgressors<sup>r</sup>; his experimental sympathy with all the members of his mystical body, or his being touched with the feeling of their infirmities<sup>s</sup>; his moderating all their afflictions, or keeping them within measure<sup>t</sup>; the secret support, which he hath hitherto afforded them<sup>u</sup>; and the intervals of grief and fear, with which, even in their greatest extremity, he hath favoured them.

Moreover, when a holy man is in trouble of mind, he may be conscious of several things in *his own present experience*, which ought also to encourage

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxiii. 6.<sup>m</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 18.<sup>n</sup> Ps. cxxx. 7.<sup>o</sup> Ps. cxxx. 4.<sup>p</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 25—28.<sup>q</sup> Heb. vii. 25. Jer. ix. 24. John v. 40.<sup>r</sup> Isa. liii. 12.<sup>s</sup> Heb. iv. 15.<sup>t</sup> Jer. xxx. 11.<sup>u</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 23.

him, to renew his exercise of trusting in Christ, and thereby to receive comfort from Him; such as these:—He finds no righteousness, nor strength, in himself, in which he can deliberately confide. He now perceives, and feels, more of the depravity of his heart, than ever he did before; which is an evidence, that he has attained more spiritual light and life. He feels now, the sin which dwelleth in him, rising, struggling, threatening to carry all before it, and indisposing him for the practice of holiness, more than he did formerly. His deadness of spirit, his hardness of heart, his enmity against God, his legal temper, his worldly mindedness, and his inability to hate, and to mourn for sin, are a burthen and a trouble to him. His inability to believe in Christ, and to pray in faith, is a ground of much uneasiness and complaint. He counts sin to be the greatest of all evils; and he is conscious of no sin in himself, but what he either loaths, or is troubled, because he cannot loath it as he should; of no sin, but what he utterly disapproves, and from which, he would count it a mercy to be saved. He dares not allow himself deliberately, to displease the Lord, but desires above all things to please Him. He highly esteems the Lord Jesus, and concludes that the loss of Him, is greater than the

“SHEPARD of New England says, that ‘more are drawn to Christ, under the sense of a *dead and blind heart*, than by all sorrows, humiliations, and terrors.’ And another eminent Minister, who was a famous instrument of converting many to God, used to say, ‘that for his own part, he had no other evidence in himself, of being in a state of grace, than that he was *sensible of his deadness*.’ BROOKS’ Cabinet, p. 48.

loss of ten thousand worlds : he is persuaded that, the possession of the whole universe, could not make him content to be without Christ. He is troubled greatly, because he can discern no satisfying evidence of his being personally interested in Christ, and in God as a covenant-God. He is greatly alarmed, and deeply perplexed, because all his past experience now appears to him, to have been counterfeit. He finds that he is utterly unable of himself, either to perform spiritual duties, or to resist spiritual enemies. He is grieved, because he cannot approve the covenant of grace as he should ; because he cannot trust cordially in Christ for salvation ; and because he is unable to exercise godly sorrow for the evils of his heart. He finds that he cannot rest upon Christ, and at the same time, that he cannot rest or be easy without him. He desires the presence of God, and the light of his gracious countenance ; and he often fears that he is not sincere, in his desire of communion with him : he also mourns for the absence of God, and cannot be kept from him. He loves the company of the saints, more than that of others. Those of his relations and acquaintance who appear unconverted, he regards with pity ; and he endeavours to recommend the Saviour and his great salvation, to their esteem. These things, in the present experience of the disconsolate Christian, of which, for the most part, he may be conscious ; though they do not, strictly speaking, afford him a warrant to renew the acting of confidence in Christ, for salvation, nor in the least degree, strengthen his revealed warrant for doing so ; yet, if he is conscious but of any one of them in himself, it should *encou-*

*rage* him to trust afresh, and not to be afraid. He ought not indeed to trust in *it*, nor to make *it the ground of his right*, to trust in the Saviour; but he should be animated and emboldened by it, to avail himself of his warrant, to renew his acting of trust in Him.

Besides, the disquieted Christian should, for his further encouragement to trust in Jesus Christ, and in God through him, consider frequently that he is not only commanded, in common with all other hearers of the gospel; but that he is in *a special manner* commanded, to trust in Him. “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, and walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let *him* trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God<sup>x</sup>:” as if Messiah, who is the speaker in the immediately preceding verse, had said to the professed members of the Israelitish Church, ‘Whoever is among you, though it were but one, who hath a sincere regard to the commandments of the Lord, and a humble veneration for his high authority; who is also willing, to listen attentively to the instructions, and to obey sincerely the laws of me, his righteous servant; and who is in the darkness especially of spiritual trouble, without the light of deliverance or comfort; tell him that I have a special command, to lay, and to urge upon him:—Let him trust; let him confide in the name of Jehovah; yea, let him continue resolutely, to rely with firm confidence, upon his God, for all grace and consolation.’ Although the believer, when he

<sup>x</sup> Isa. l. 10.



is walking in the darkness of mental trouble, cannot for ordinary, perceive that God is his God in possession; yet he is at least firmly to believe that He is his God *in offer*, and frequently, as well as cordially, to say that he is his *in choice*, and *in preference* to every other God; and so, to place an unsuspecting confidence in him. The gracious and special command, then, which Messiah here giveth him, to confide constantly in Him, and in God through him; should be regarded by the disconsolate Christian, as the very highest encouragement to intrust to him, all the concerns of his disquieted soul.

7. The troubled Christian, accordingly, in order to recover consolation to his wounded spirit, ought without delay, to trust in the Lord Jesus, and in God as reconciled in Him. He should, in dependance on the grace of Christ, instantly strive to trust that God the Father loveth him, and hath good-will toward him<sup>1</sup>; that Jesus Christ saveth him, and that He will save him to the uttermost<sup>2</sup>; and that the blessed Spirit will in due time, restore comfort to him. Let him not delay trusting in the Saviour, till he be in a better frame, or till he be so brought forth to the light, as to discern some good qualifications in his own heart; but let him, even whilst he is in darkness, endeavour to trust, and to say, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him<sup>3</sup>: if I perish, I shall perish, casting myself down at the feet of the Saviour, for mercy. He who is the Lamb of God, is too gracious, too merciful, to suffer any to perish *there*: if he save me not, I cannot be much worse than I am: in this way, I can but perish; and it may be I shall

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 16.    <sup>2</sup> Isa. xxxiii. 22.    <sup>3</sup> Job xiii. 15.

be saved.' When a good man is in the darkness of spiritual trouble, let him not sit down desponding in that darkness; but let him *walk on* in it, and walk by faith: let him presently and resolutely, humbly and confidently, trust in the infinitely faithful, and compassionate Redeemer. Elihu's exhortation to Job, when he was in darkness, is addressed also to him: "Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him <sup>b</sup>." He ought then to adopt without delay, the resolution of the holy Psalmist, and to say to the Lord,—“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee <sup>c</sup>.” It is his present duty, to place the confidence of his heart in Jesus, that faithful trustee of the everlasting covenant, and to say with the afflicted Psalmist, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me; thou wilt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me: The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me <sup>d</sup>.” “Thou wilt light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness <sup>e</sup>.” “Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory <sup>f</sup>.” Let him trust, not only that the Lord Jesus will, according to his promise, save him with an everlasting salvation, but that he will in due season comfort him; and let him say with holy David, “Thou who hast shewn me great and sore troubles, wilt quicken me again, and wilt bring me up again, *or*, wilt return, wilt bring me up from the depths of the earth. Thou wilt increase

<sup>b</sup> Job xxxv. 14.    <sup>c</sup> Ps. lvi. 3.    <sup>d</sup> Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 8.

<sup>e</sup> Ps. xviii. 28.    <sup>f</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 24.

my greatness, and comfort me on *every* side<sup>g</sup> ;” so that, as if he had said, ‘ I shall in due time, see nothing dark or discouraging on *any* side.’ The disconsolate Christian, should confide likewise in the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort, and with the church of Israel, say, “ My God will hear me : Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy : when I fall, I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me. He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon me ; he will subdue my iniquities ; and he will cast all my sins into the depths of the sea<sup>h</sup>.” He ought to trust even in a frowning and withdrawing God ; to trust Him, though he cannot trace him, and, like the woman of Canaan, to be resolute and peremptory in trusting him.

Nor should he be afraid, that his endeavouring thus to trust, is presumption. Presumption is *unwarrantable or groundless* confidence. It cannot then be presumption, so long as he is conscious that, he trusteth *only* in Christ and in God ; and that, he places confidence in Christ and in God, not upon the ground of any good thing in his own heart or life ; but only, upon the Divine warrant, which is afforded him in the gospel. Nor ought he to fear that he is acting presumptuously, so long as he is conscious that, he sincerely endeavours to trust in the Saviour, not for a part merely, but for the *whole* of salvation ; not for salvation in *any* sin, but for salvation from *every* sin ; not for salvation, *with* sin, or *to* sin, but for that salva-

<sup>g</sup> Ps. lxxi. 20, 21.

<sup>h</sup> Mic. vii. 7, 8, 9, 19.

tion, which comprises *universal holiness* of heart and life; not for salvation by his own righteousness, but for salvation by *grace*, reigning through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, unto eternal life<sup>1</sup>; and for salvation, not for his own glory, but for the glory of Christ, and of God in Him. Presumption also is *unreasonable* confidence. But nothing can be more reasonable, than that a needy sinner come at the *command* of God, and trust with firm confidence, in Jesus Christ, for all that salvation which is laid up in Christ, laid out in the promise, and brought near in the offer of the gospel. And nothing, on the contrary, can be more unreasonable, than to trust for that which, it is impossible even for omnipotence itself, to afford, and which, the Saviour hath never promised to give—salvation in sin—salvation, consistently with a man's retaining of some darling lust—salvation merely from the punishment of sin—salvation, in order to be at liberty to commit sin with impunity. In few words, The disconsolate Christian should not fear, that his trusting in the Lord Jesus, for salvation to himself in particular, is presumptuous confidence; if it is accompanied with *fear*, that he doth not approve cordially, the whole scheme of redemption delineated in the gospel; with *desire*, so to approve it; and with *diligence*, in the use of all the other means of grace within his reach.

In his endeavouring to trust cordially in the blessed Saviour, for salvation, he must not overlook the *promises* of salvation. All the promises of God, being in Christ, yea and Amen, are, in and

<sup>1</sup> Acts xv. 11. Rom. v. 21.

with Christ, offered in the gospel to him. He should, therefore, in applying Christ to himself, embrace or apply the promises, not indeed separate from Christ, but in and with Him; and believing that the absolute promises especially, are, in the offer, directed to him for his acceptance, he must rely on the faithfulness of God in them, which is pledged for the performance of them; and so, trust in Christ, for the performance of them to *himself*. To trust for salvation is, to rely with confidence, not only on Christ and his righteousness, but on the truth of the promises. It is to rely and live upon Christ, not as felt in the heart, but as offered and promised in the gospel; and it must be of the same extent as the promises. The absolute promises of the eternal covenant, are open. They are free. The disquieted Christian, therefore, should cast himself freely upon them, when feelings and evidences fail. He has been trying if he had already, a personal interest in the Redeemer; and he has found no satisfying evidences of it in himself. Let him, for a little while, forbear that inquiry; and, in the mean time, put the matter out of doubt, by trusting that Christ *now giveth* him, a saving interest in Him. Every scriptural evidence of a personal interest in the Redeemer, is either comprised in faith, or is a consequence of faith. Let his actings of faith in Christ, and in the promise, then, be distinct and express, in order that, he may be conscious that he is acting it<sup>k</sup>: and at the same time, let him rest, not on the act, but on the glorious Object, of his faith; and draw consolation, not

<sup>k</sup> Ps. xci. 2. Lam. iii. 24.

from the act, but by the act, from Christ and the promises.

To trust simply in the Lord Jesus for salvation to himself, is the *principal* mean, which the disconsolate Christian should employ, for attaining spiritual comfort. Without this, no other means will be of the smallest avail. To rely with cordial and unsuspecting affiance, upon the faithful Redeemer, and the free promises, is not only in itself, an ease to the troubled soul<sup>1</sup>; but is, according to the covenant of grace, the appointed instrument of deriving consolation, as well as holiness, from the fulness of Christ. After Job had said, “I know that my Redeemer liveth<sup>m</sup>,” &c. he was so relieved from the extremity of his trouble, that he no more uttered such doleful complaints, as before. “The Lord is my strength and my shield,” says David, “my heart *trusted* in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly *rejoiceth*, and with my song will I praise him<sup>n</sup>.” Again, “I had fainted, unless I had *believed to see* the goodness of the Lord, in the land of the living<sup>o</sup>.” And again, “I have *trusted* in thy mercy; my heart shall *rejoice* in thy salvation<sup>p</sup>.” The Lord Jesus said to his disconsolate disciples, “Let not your hearts be *troubled*, ye believe in God, *believe* also in me<sup>q</sup>.” If the disquieted Christian, then, would recover spiritual consolation, let him “hold the *beginning* of his confidence, stedfast unto the end<sup>r</sup>.” Let him come frequently to Jesus, the Consolation of

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 3.

<sup>m</sup> Job xix. 25.

<sup>n</sup> Ps. xxviii. 7.

<sup>o</sup> Ps. xxvii. 13.

<sup>p</sup> Ps. xiii. 5.

<sup>q</sup> John xiv. 1.

<sup>r</sup> Heb. iii. 14.

Israel, and come every time, as if it were the first time, or, as if he were but beginning to come: let him come as a sinner in himself, and trust that Christ will save him from his sin, and from his trouble. So will the joy of God's salvation, be in due time restored to him. By thus casting all his care upon his gracious Redeemer, who careth for him, his depressed spirit will become easy and cheerful.

8. He must also for the same purpose, *hope* in the Lord Jesus, and in God as the God of all comfort. Spiritual hope, comprises a cordial *desire and expectation* of all promised good things, both in time and in eternity. It is a certain, and a longing, expectation of all the good of the everlasting covenant; and is grounded, on the declarations and promises of the gospel; on the perfections of God in Christ, and his relations to his people; and on the office, righteousness, fulness, and intercession of Christ. It hath an inestimably precious object, and a heart-purifying and enlivening influence<sup>s</sup>. It is a consequence of saving faith, and is inseparably connected with it. Faith, is a trusting that the faithful Redeemer, will perform all the *promises* of his eternal covenant to me: hope, is a desire and an expectation of all the future *blessings*, which are therein promised. It is a living principle, which revives and supports, strengthens and elevates, the soul of the true believer, and which carries him beyond this finite scene, into that which is infinite; where he is transported with the joyful prospect of life eternal, in the im-

<sup>s</sup> 1 John iii. 2, 3. 1 Pet. i. 3.

mediate presence of God and the Lamb, of seeing his glorious Redeemer as he is, of being like him, and of the full enjoyment of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for evermore. Now the dejected believer should, for his comfort, endeavour frequently to exercise this living hope; this "hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him". He must, in dependance on the grace of Christ, hope for all necessary grace; and especially, "for the grace that is to be brought unto him, at the revelation of Jesus Christ". He ought to hope that the Lord will in due season, comfort him; that "the God of hope will yet fill him, with all joy and peace in believing". He must, if he would recover holy consolation, charge his soul, as the Psalmist did, to "hope in God"; to hope that he shall yet have comfort from God; that he "shall yet praise him, for the salvation of his countenance," for the manifestation of his favour to his soul, and for the consolation which will ensue. He ought to hope even against hope, "to hope continually," and "to shew diligence to the full assurance of hope, unto the end". His Redeemer is the great God, and he resolveth to act like himself. The believer should therefore expect great, as well as good things, from Him; great deliverances and supplies, great enlargements and consolations, great mercy and peace, and a great salvation<sup>2</sup>. The Lord Jesus is "the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof, in time of trouble." He

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.<sup>2</sup> Ps. xliii. 5.<sup>u</sup> 1 Pet. i. 13.<sup>y</sup> Heb. vi. 14.<sup>w</sup> Rom. xv. 13.<sup>z</sup> Jer. xxxiii. 3.



will often disappoint the fears of the timorous believer; but will never disappoint his hopes, in so far as they are grounded on, and regulated by, the promises. Let him therefore build his hope no longer, upon any good thing, wrought in, or done by himself; but let him build it wholly, upon the righteousness and grace of Christ, and upon the promises and faithfulness of God. The exercise of a well-grounded hope, tends to settle the heart, and to calm the troubled spirit. "It is good, therefore, that a man should both hope, and quietly wait, for the salvation of the Lord. For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies<sup>a</sup>." That hope, when it is accompanied in its exercise, with *filial fear*, pleases the Lord greatly: and it is a special mean, of attaining the light of his gracious countenance<sup>b</sup>.

The disconsolate believer should at no time, suspect, that his endeavouring to hope, is presumption; so long as he is conscious that, his expectation is founded solely, upon the grace and power of God, exhibited in the declarations and offers of the gospel, upon the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ, and upon the faithfulness of God in the promises<sup>c</sup>. True hope is grounded, not upon that which the Christian feels in himself, but upon that which Jesus felt in his stead; not upon what he doth for Christ, but upon what Christ did, and is still doing for him. Evidences of grace in the heart and life, are indeed great encouragements to exercise hope; but they are not the grounds upon

<sup>a</sup> Lam. iii. 26, 31, 32. <sup>b</sup> Ps. cxlvii. 11. <sup>c</sup> Ps. cxxx. 5, 7.

which, *true* hope is built. He who exercises a living hope, is diligent in using all appointed means of grace; and yet, he does not rest upon the use of those means, but upon the Lord as speaking to him, in his word of grace.

9. Another mean of recovering spiritual comfort, is *diligence* in the exercise of *evangelical repentance*. If the disconsolate Christian would exercise repentance, in an upright and acceptable manner; he must, first of all, in the faith of pardoning mercy, and of sanctifying grace, repent of his unbelieving, distrustful, and desponding thoughts, and next, of all his other sins. His unbelief and distrust of the Saviour, are his radical crimes; and therefore, in his exercise of repentance, he ought to begin at them. And in order to exercise repentance sincerely and acceptably, he should trust that the Lord Jesus, the exalted Prince and Saviour, *giveth* repentance to him, and forgiveness of sins<sup>d</sup>. It is faith in pardoning mercy, that breaks the heart, and that opens all the sluices of godly sorrow for sin. Trusting, then, in the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of God in him<sup>e</sup>, he should endeavour to attain a true, and a humbling sense of his iniquity. Without placing confidence in redeeming mercy, a man may have a sense of sin, but *not a true* sense of it: he may have a sense of sin, as hurtful to himself<sup>f</sup>, but not as hateful to God<sup>g</sup>; a sense of the danger and demerit, but not of the deep malignity and pollution, of sin. The dejected Christian, therefore, should study to at-

<sup>d</sup> Acts v. 31.

<sup>f</sup> Gen. iv. 13.

<sup>e</sup> Ps. xiii. 5. Joel ii. 13.

<sup>g</sup> Habak. i. 13.

tain by faith, a spiritual sight and sense of the horrible malignity, as well as of the infinite demerit, of his unbelief and other transgressions. He must without delay, and in the exercise of faith, look upon Jesus whom he hath pierced; in order that, his grief for the loss of his comfort, may be turned into godly sorrow for those iniquities, which have pierced his dear Saviour, and procured for himself that grievous loss<sup>b</sup>. Viewing his iniquity as laid on Christ, and Christ as pierced for it in his stead, he must also, with holy self-loathing, and deep abhorrence of his sin, turn, not from one sin to another, but from all sin to God<sup>c</sup>. Let him hate sin, and hate it *as* sin<sup>d</sup>. Let his hatred be universal against all sin, and irreconcilable to any sin<sup>e</sup>. He must, in the faith of redeeming mercy, turn from all iniquity, and especially, from the sins for which, the Lord is pleading a controversy with him<sup>f</sup>; and say with Ephraim of old, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God<sup>g</sup>.” Trusting that the Lord his God turneth him, he should turn to “the Lord with all his heart, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning<sup>h</sup>.” He ought to turn to the love of God<sup>i</sup>, and to the spiritual performance of every duty to him<sup>j</sup>. This is what, the Israelitish Church in her captivity, resolved to do: “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord<sup>k</sup>.” If the disconsolate

<sup>b</sup> Zech. xii 10.<sup>c</sup> Isa. vi 5. Hos. vi. 1.<sup>d</sup> Ps. cxix. 104.<sup>e</sup> Ps. ci. 3.<sup>f</sup> Ezek. xiv. 6.<sup>g</sup> Jer. xxxi. 18.<sup>h</sup> Joel ii. 12.<sup>i</sup> Isa. xxvi. 13.<sup>j</sup> Ps. cxix. 105.<sup>k</sup> Lam. iii. 40.

believer would recover pure consolation, let the exercise of his faith and hope, be penitential. And if, after all his endeavours, he find that he cannot shed a tear, or feel such bitter sorrow for sin, as he longs to feel; let him not be discouraged, but recollect that turning, with holy abhorrence, from all iniquity, to the Lord, is the very *essence* of true repentance. Let him turn from his sins of omission, and especially, from his sin of suffering himself to be discouraged, by a sense of the corruption of his nature, from the great duties of believing and rejoicing in Christ Jesus<sup>†</sup>; by which, he hath brought up an evil report upon the good ways of the Lord. And he ought not to fear, that his repentance is legal or hypocritical, so long as he is conscious, that he endeavours to exercise *godly* sorrow for all sin, as sin, and to turn from it, because it is sin. The repentance of the legalist or hypocrite, is not so much, sorrow for sin, as a sullen grief, that he is not allowed to sin with impunity; not so much, a turning from sin to the Lord, as a turning from one sin to another<sup>‡</sup>.

As the exercise of evangelical repentance, is an appointed mean, so it is a *sure* mean, of recovering holy consolation: for thus saith the Lord, “To this man will I *look*, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word<sup>§</sup>.” “The Lord is *nigh* unto them that are of a broken heart; and he *saveth* such as be of a contrite spirit<sup>¶</sup>.” “He *healeth* the broken in heart, and *bindeth up* their wounds<sup>||</sup>.” As soon as Ephraim’s-

† Phil. iii. 3.

‡ Hos. vii. 16.

§ Isa. lxvi. 2.

¶ Ps. xxxiv. 18.

|| Ps. cxlvii. 3.

heart is troubled for his iniquities, God's bowels are troubled for Ephraim; and He will surely have mercy upon him'. Godly sorrow for sin, is not only a mean of attaining future comfort, but is accompanied with present consolation. There is more joy in the penitential mourning of a humble believer, than in all the vain mirth of an unregenerate man.

10. He ought for the same end, *to meditate frequently* on the blessed Jesus, and on God as a God of grace in Him.

He is disposed to muse often on the trouble of his own mind; but he should rather, contemplate *the sufferings of Christ's soul*. Were he frequently to meditate on the unparalleled anguish, the doleful agony, of his dear Redeemer's soul, when He was enduring for him, the vindictive wrath of God, and was not allowed to discern the least smile, in the countenance of his righteous Father; it might be a happy mean of calming the tumult of his own soul. The compassionate Saviour, in love to him, and for his salvation, drank a cup of unmixed wrath; and he putteth into his hand, only a cup of suffering, mixed with many sweet and salutary ingredients. What are his sorrows, then, to those of the Lord Jesus? There is no comparison. There was more bitterness in one drop of Christ's sufferings, than in an ocean of his. Devout meditation on the loving, the agonizing, the dying Redeemer, hath often been a reviving, and a delightful exercise to holy souls. "My meditation of Him," saith the Psalmist, "shall be

' Jer. xxxi. 20.

sweet<sup>2</sup>." It hath, many times, been sweet and soothing to holy men, even under spiritual trouble.

The disquieted believer should, moreover, think frequently on *God in Christ*, as a God of mercy and grace, and on his amiable perfections, and precious promises. In Christ, God manifests himself to be a gracious, a promising, and a performing God; to be just such a God, as an afflicted saint would choose to have to do with. In Him, God exhibits his infinitely glorious excellencies, in the most amiable, attractive and encouraging point of view. He manifests himself, to be "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." To present Him often to the mind, therefore, in *that* point of view, will, in the hand of the adorable Comforter, be a sovereign cordial to a drooping spirit. Hence the afflicted Psalmist said, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee, from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar<sup>2</sup>:" as if he had said, 'I will, in order to cheer my drooping spirit, remember thee as a God of mercy: I will call to remembrance, thy love and faithfulness, thy power and presence in the sanctuary: I will remember thee, from the most distant countries, to which I may be driven.' To the same purpose, he says in another Psalm, "My soul shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches<sup>3</sup>." Asaph likewise, when his soul was in trouble, said, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the

<sup>2</sup> Ps. civ. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xlii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxiii. 5, 6.

Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings<sup>c</sup>." The dejected Christian must, in order to attain peace and comfort, meditate on God, especially as a God in covenant; as a God, offering and promising to be a God to him; and that, from regard to no worthiness in him, but merely, to the glory of his own free and sovereign grace. He ought frequently to contemplate the covenant of grace, in the making, the fulfilling, and the administration of it: for, the Lord hath devised and established that gracious covenant, as the rule according to which, all his dispensations of grace and providence, are adjusted. There, the timorous believer will see that, all is of infinitely free grace; that, every blessing is to be received as a free gift; that, the great Redeemer himself, is "given for a covenant of the people;" that, God is first in the obligation of the covenant; and that, there is no tie upon the believer, but what depends on, and is similar to, the tie which the believer has upon God.

11. He should also, in order to receive comfort, *pray much* in the name of Christ, and so pour out his heart, before his gracious God and Father. This was the exercise of David, when his soul was disquieted. "O my God, saith he, my soul is cast down within me." And again, "I will say unto God my Rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning, because of the oppression of the enemy<sup>d</sup>?" He had already charged his soul to

<sup>c</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 10—12.

<sup>d</sup> Ps. xlii. 6; 9.

hope in God, and no longer to yield to disquieting grief and fear, but had found no relief; and therefore he betook himself to his Covenant-God, and complained of his disquietude, to Him. Although he could not himself, command a calm in his troubled spirit; yet he knew that his redeeming God could. He therefore complained *to* the Lord, but did not complain *of* him. He complained not, that afflictive dispensations had troubled his soul; but, that his soul had troubled itself. “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me,” saith he, “I poured out my complaint before him: I shewed before him my trouble.” He presented this supplication to him; “O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: O save me for thy mercies’ sake.” The apostle James saith, “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.” The Lord Jesus, recommends this duty to disconsolate believers, by his own example; for we read that, when He was “in an agony, he prayed more earnestly.” The prayer of faith, is a sure mean of obtaining relief: for thus saith Jehovah, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” Does the distressed Christian say, That he feels himself sadly indisposed for the duty of prayer; or, that he has been long attempting the exercise of

\* Ps. cxlii. 2, 3.

† Luke xxii. 44.

‡ Ps. vi. 1—4.

§ Ps. l. 15.

¶ James v. 13.



it; but, that the Lord “shutteth out his prayer<sup>k</sup>?” Let him, nevertheless, persist in *trying* to pray, and in looking up for an answer<sup>l</sup>. Is he ready to say, that he cannot pray acceptably? Let him attempt it, as he can, and commit it, notwithstanding all the imperfection attending it, to the Lord Jesus, his “Advocate with the Father.” Jesus will with infinite ease, understand it, and will put it into such language, as will be accepted in the court of heaven. He should, therefore, “come boldly to the throne of grace,” and present such requests as would shew, that he hath honourable sentiments of the riches, and the munificence, of the King of glory. He ought to come, firmly persuaded that, though a little is too much, for his desert; yet that, much is too little for his great Redeemer’s bounty<sup>m</sup>. By so doing, he will greatly

<sup>k</sup> Lam. iii. 8.

<sup>l</sup> Luke xviii. 1.

<sup>m</sup> In order to illustrate the sentiment here expressed, I cannot forbear mentioning a heathen story:—Alexander had a Philosopher in his court, who once was greatly straitened in his circumstances. He, on that occasion, applied for money to his sovereign, the conqueror of the world. No sooner was his request made than granted. Alexander gave him a commission to receive from his treasurer, whatever sum he wanted. He immediately went and demanded a hundred talents, which amount to about ten thousand pounds sterling. The treasurer surprised at so large a demand, refused to comply; but waited upon the king, and represented to him, how unreasonable, he thought, the petition was, and how exorbitant, the sum. Alexander heard him with patience; but, as soon as he had ended his remonstrance, replied; ‘Let the money be immediately given him. I like that man: I am delighted with his way of thinking. He has done me a singular honour; and, by the largeness of

honour the marvellous loving-kindness of the Lord. When he prays for spiritual comfort, or for any other spiritual blessing, let him pray in faith; and according to his faith, it will in due time, be unto him<sup>a</sup>. He ought, as the Canaanitish woman did, to convert, even the greatest discouragements, into so many encouragements, to trust and plead the promises. He must not conclude, that his prayers are lost, or are hypocritical; merely because he doth not experience comfort in them, and does not receive the very thing which he asketh. Mercies seldom do good to that man, who is over peremptory in asking them. It is only the prayer of faith, founded on the promises; and regulated by them, that is the outlet from trouble, and the inlet of consolation. Even the *desire* thus to pray, is a forerunner of success, and an earnest of the blessing implored. "Thou drewest near," saith Jeremiah, "in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not<sup>b</sup>." The more speedily, God seemeth to be departing from the disconsolate believer, he ought to pursue after him, with the firmer trust, and the greater importunity: and in praying for spiritual consolation, he should ask only that measure of it, which the Lord may see proper to give him; and should ask it, not so much for his own relief, as for the glory of redeeming grace. In continuing so to do, he shall in the fittest season, experience a heavenly sweetness, diffusing itself over his troubled soul; and shall from his experience,

his request, he has shown, what a high idea he has, both of my great riches, and my royal munificence.

<sup>a</sup> Mark xi. 24

<sup>b</sup> Lam. iii. 57.

know, that it is better to “*seek the Lord,*” than to *find* all things else.

When the afflicted believer is praying, he must endeavour to *praise and thank* the Lord. This also, is a special mean of recovering holy consolation. We read, in a passage of scripture, cited above, that the Psalmist said to his dejected soul, “*Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him*”<sup>p</sup>; as if he had said, ‘*I hope yet to praise him : I long to praise him.*’ This grateful and adoring frame, was not only an evidence of David’s beginning to emerge out of the depth of his trouble; but was likewise a *mean*, of his emerging. The depressed Christian, then, if he would attain spiritual comfort, should study in his prayers, to occupy at least as much time, in thanking the Lord for the mercies vouchsafed to him, as in confessing the sins committed by him. This would tend greatly, to remove his bitterness of spirit, and to bring refreshing consolation to his weary soul. The frequent mentioning of things, that are sweet and cheering, is a mean of sweetening the temper of the mind, and of promoting cheerfulness of spirit. Were the disquieted believer, to take special notice of the manifold blessings, which are still vouchsafed to him, and frequently to bless the Lord for them; he would not remain long after, in an uncomfortable frame<sup>q</sup>. He ought therefore to esteem it his privilege, as well as his duty, in every condition, to give thanks to God<sup>r</sup>. He should be thankful that, his heavenly Father condescendeth to be angry with him, and to reprove him for sin;

<sup>p</sup> Ps. xlii. 5. <sup>q</sup> Lam. iii. 22—24. <sup>r</sup> 1 Thess. v. 18.

that, he hath not given him over to a reprobate mind<sup>s</sup>; and that, the sin which dwelleth in him, is in any measure, a burthen to him. If he is unworthy even of the *least*, of all the mercies bestowed upon him, he surely ought to be thankful for the least of them<sup>v</sup>.

12. He ought, moreover, to *wait patiently* for the Lord. If the disquieted believer would regain holy tranquillity of mind, he must “both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord<sup>u</sup>.” He must say, as Messiah himself did, “I will wait upon the Lord, who hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him<sup>w</sup>.” The way to recover his comfort, is, to say to his soul, “My soul, wait thou *only* upon God; for my expectation is from him.” His duty at all times, and especially when his soul is disquieted, is, to “rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; to wait on the Lord, and keep his way<sup>x</sup>.” “Though the vision tarry,” he ought to “wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry” a moment longer than the appointed time<sup>y</sup>. He should consider that the Lord, who hath appointed that great affliction for him, is infinitely wise, righteous, and good; that he is his own God, the God of his salvation<sup>z</sup>; and that, by such methods as please him least, God often doth him the most good. Moreover, the time that he hath to wait, is but short. Yet a little while, and the compassionate Saviour will come and save him. The Lord Jesus waited

<sup>s</sup> Job v. 17. Ps. xciv. 12.

<sup>t</sup> Gen. xxxii. 10.

<sup>u</sup> Lam. iii. 26.

<sup>w</sup> Isa. viii. 17.

<sup>x</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 7, 34.

<sup>y</sup> Hab. ii. 3.

<sup>z</sup> Ps. lxxxviii. 1.

long for *him*; and he waiteth still, for a fit opportunity to comfort him, more than he himself can wait, for the enjoyment of comfort. “Therefore will the Lord wait,” saith Isaiah, “that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment<sup>a</sup>.” Although he has no prospect of deliverance soon, yet let him still wait, until the time to favour him, even the set time be come; and wait, with a patient and silent resignation to the Divine will<sup>b</sup>. The Lord is waiting for the very same day of comfort, for which, the disconsolate saint is to wait; and if the Lord cannot be disappointed, so neither can he. There is in the love of Christ to him, an earnest longing, as it were, that the day might come. And therefore he may, in submission to the will of his gracious God, lawfully pray, as the holy Psalmist did<sup>c</sup>, even for a speedy deliverance. But, if his mental trouble still continue, he must resolve to wait patiently, and to justify the infinitely wise God, in his delaying to return with comfort to him. Let him still “hope, and quietly wait;” for it is the time of his extremity, that is commonly the Lord’s opportunity of appearing for his relief. Holy consolation, is worth his waiting for it: it is, as it were, the opening of heaven upon the soul. Let him therefore wait, and the Lord will, at the time appointed, so console his troubled spirit, as to cause him from experience to say, “Lo, this is my God; I have waited for him, and he will save me:”

<sup>a</sup> Isa. xxx. 18. <sup>b</sup> Isa. xxviii. 16. <sup>c</sup> Ps. xxxi. 2. and cil. 2.

this is the Lord ; I have waited for him, I shall be glad and rejoice in his salvation <sup>d</sup>." The longer he stays in expectation, for spiritual consolation, the sweeter and purer, at length, will the enjoyment of it prove. Let his patience then be the "patience of hope." It is hope, that giveth life and vigour to patience. He must not suffer his exercise of patience to be interrupted, either by fretting himself, or by betaking himself for comfort, to any creature. He should not fret himself in any wise ; but should, with humbleness and calmness of spirit, wait upon the Lord. Let him firmly resolve to wait God's time, and to bear his frown <sup>e</sup> ; in humble expectation, that He will at length, return and visit him, with the light of his countenance, and with the joy of his salvation.

13. It is also requisite, in order to recover true comfort, that, a holy man be constantly on his guard, *against yielding to any motion of sin*, in his heart ; and that, he be *pressing on* toward more holiness of heart and of life.

He must, in dependance on the promise of sanctification, always take heed, that he *do not yield* to any secret motion of sin in his heart. If he would have his conscience pacified and peaceful, he must strive to keep it pure. Sin, like Achan in the camp, or Jonah in the ship, is that which causeth trouble. If the disconsolate believer allow himself, for a season, to yield to any motion of sin, or temptation of Satan, or of the world, he cannot be easy or comfortable in his mind. Although a traveller were sure that he was to reach, in safety,

<sup>d</sup> Isa. xlv. 25

<sup>e</sup> Mic. vii. 2

the place to which he was going; yet if he travelled with a thorn in his foot, he could not but be sensible of pain, at every step. If the Christian suffer himself to connive, especially at that in himself, which he knows to be wrong, he cannot but be disquieted. Uprightness and singleness of heart, are necessary to his recovering of lost comfort. God hath made an eternal separation, between continuance in the love and practice of any sin, and holy tranquillity of mind: Let therefore the afflicted believer, in the faith that Christ will strengthen him, maintain a resolute and continual struggle, against the first risings, the secret motions, of depravity in his heart. It is as natural for sin indulged, to raise and increase doubts and fears in his mind, as for rotten wood to breed worms. Every instance of his yielding to a motion of sin, will be like a blot upon his evidences for heaven. Let him, then, in all his conflicts with the risings of sin, diligently study, both to discover, and to mortify, the corruption of his nature; both to sigh under the burthen, and to act against the power, of the sin that dwelleth in him. It should always be his manner, to attack and mortify sin, in its *first* risings: for, as that which usually destroys his peace of conscience, is his indulging of corrupt desires; so his constant endeavour, through grace, to resist and quell them, before they have time to acquire strength, is a sure mean of recovering spiritual comfort.

He should also endeavour daily, to attain *more and more holiness* of heart and life. True holiness consists, of loving the Lord our God supremely, of delighting in Him as manifested in Jesus Christ,

and of studying habitually to serve him with gladness<sup>f</sup>, as well as with abhorrence of all iniquity. Spiritual comfort accordingly is a part of holiness. The more, a believer advances in universal holiness, the more of the *principle and habit* of pure consolation, does he possess; and the more of the principle and habit of this holy comfort, he attains, the more of the enjoyment of it, shall he have in every time of need. The disconsolate Christian, then, to the end that he may recover sensible comfort, should, by faith, receive out of the fulness of Christ, greater measures of sanctifying grace; that he may, not only die daily to sin, but live to righteousness. He ought, from principles of faith and love, and for the glory of his redeeming God, to become more and more diligent in all the duties of holiness. This, though it shall not merit consolation for him, yet, will in his experience be connected with consolation; yea, it will itself be a comfort to him. “Our rejoicing is this,” saith an Apostle, “the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world<sup>g</sup>.” To be advancing sensibly, in conformity to the Lord Jesus, and in holy activity for his glory, cannot fail to be very pleasing and encouraging to a holy man. Although the beginning of comfort in the soul, is necessary to the practice of true holiness; yet, the practice of holiness, is requisite to the increase of comfort, and to the recovering of it, after it hath in any measure been lost<sup>h</sup>. Let it, then, be the ardent

<sup>f</sup> Ps. c. 21.<sup>g</sup> 2 Cor. i. 12.<sup>h</sup> Isa. xxxii. 17.

John xiv. 21. Gal. vi. 16.



desire of the believer's soul, and the settled purpose of his heart, to advance daily in the love and practice of universal holiness. Let perfection of holiness, be the ruling wish of his heart, and the great purpose of his life, to which he uniformly directs all his efforts. Let his will be always, in union with the will of Christ, and with the glory of God; and then, Christ "will give him the desires of his heart<sup>i</sup>:" then, he shall know by experience, that a supreme regard to the will, and to the glory of God, is, the health and happiness of the soul.

14. As a mean of attaining the spiritual comfort which he desires, the Christian, if he be capable, must *perform diligently, the duties of his lawful calling*. Though this forms a part of the holiness, mentioned in the particular immediately preceding; yet the special importance of it, as a mean of comfort, requires that it be considered by itself. Let the disconsolate believer take care, that he regard idleness, as a continued omission of the duty, required in the eighth commandment of the moral law; and that he abhor it, as a continued crime, and as a reproach to his holy profession<sup>k</sup>. To be idle, even for a single day, without real and evident necessity, is dangerous to any Christian; but especially, to a Christian in trouble of conscience. It is a tempting of Satan, to come and find employment for him; and it is a leaving of himself at leisure, to weigh, one after another, the temptations of that subtle, and malicious enemy. A Heathen philosopher terms idleness, 'The grave of a living man;' and a holy minister of the

<sup>i</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 4.

<sup>k</sup> 1 Tim. v. 8.

gospel styles it, ‘ The hell of a living Christian.’ Let the disquieted Christian then, be constantly upon his guard against idleness, and especially against a *disposition* to be idle. Let his heart, as well as his hands, be exercised, in a voluntary and diligent performance of the various duties of some honest, and useful vocation ; otherwise, his heart will work out of itself, a still greater degree of trouble to him. Idleness feeds, and increases, the distemper of a troubled soul ; whereas, lawful employment occupies the mind, and takes it off from poring incessantly, upon the causes and aggravations of the trouble. When Elijah the prophet, was in depression of mind, the Lord would not suffer him to sit still in any place. When he sat down under a Juniper-tree, “ an angel touched him, and commanded him to arise and eat :” when he again lay down, the Angel of the Lord, a second time, roused him to action. When he went to a cave at Horeb, in order to lodge there, “ the word of the Lord came to him, and said, What dost thou here, Elijah ? Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” Soon afterwards, when he was standing in the entrance to the cave, the Lord again disturbed his repose, and said to him, “ Go return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus <sup>1</sup>.” If it is a Christian’s duty, even when he is under the disease of melancholy, to be diligent in business ; it is no less his duty, when he is troubled in soul, merely on a spiritual account. He must not therefore say, either that he is disinclined to work, or that his trouble is so great, that he is unable to

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xix. 4—16.

work ; until he first, be well satisfied from the Oracles of truth, that such excuses will be sustained at the tribunal of Christ, the omniscient, and righteous Judge of the world. The Holy Comforter hath, in wonderful condescension, visited with the joy of his salvation, many thousands of his saints, at the very times in which, from regard to his authority, they have been employed in the business of their several callings.

15. If he have reason to apprehend that he is, in any degree, under melancholy, which, as has been observed above, is a bodily disease ; he should *frequently intrust his imagination*, to the blessed Redeemer, that sovereign Physician of soul and body, in the hope that He will cure the distemper of it. So long as the imagination continues weak and disordered, it will present to the understanding, even the most encouraging, and amiable objects, in a distorted, discouraging, and unamiable form ; and so long as that is the case, trouble of mind, or sadness of spirit, must in a greater or less degree, continue. The melancholy Christian therefore should, not only trust in the compassionate Saviour, for consolation to his troubled soul ; but he should, in the use of other appointed means, trust that, so far as it can subserve the glory of God in his salvation, Jesus will deliver him from the distemper of his natural spirits. He ought to trust in the great Redeemer, for the health of his *body*, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit<sup>m</sup>, as well as, for the happiness of his soul ; in order that both soul and body may be prepared, to “ serve the Lord with.

<sup>m</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 19.

gladness." He is fully warranted to rely with firm confidence, on the Lord Jesus, for all that is necessary to enable him to glorify God, in his body, and in his spirit, which are God's<sup>n</sup>.

16. To *disclose the condition of his soul*, to some experienced and judicious Minister, or private Christian, is also a mean of recovering tranquillity of mind, which, the disconsolate believer should not fail to employ. He ought, if possible, to select for this purpose, some holy and humble Minister, or private Christian, who had himself been in trouble of mind, but has mercifully been delivered from it; and who appears now, to be confirmed in faith, and to be filled with joy and peace in believing. He should without delay, discover the condition of his soul to such a one. He ought to reveal to him, as fully and distinctly as he can, What it is, that more immediately troubles and depresses his mind; what it is, that makes him conclude himself, to be yet unregenerate, and his former experience, to have been but counterfeit; what the grounds of his present doubts and fears, are; and especially, why he cannot trust in the infinitely compassionate Saviour, for salvation to himself in particular. He should, if he can with prudence, hint to such a one, the sin or sins which, he apprehends, have provoked the Lord to plead this controversy with him; in order, that he may afford him an opportunity, of speaking pertinently to his condition<sup>o</sup>. "When I kept silence," saith David, "my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long<sup>p</sup>;" as if he had said, 'The sin which, I did not freely

<sup>n</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20.    <sup>o</sup> James v. 16.    <sup>p</sup> Ps. xxxii. 3.

and ingenuously confess to the Lord, and also to persons skilful in aswaging trouble of mind, rankled inwardly, and occasioned unspeakable anguish in my soul.' The affliction of the soul, as well as that of the body, should be made known to such a fellow-Christian, as appears qualified to suggest suitable advices, and encouragements; to the end that, these may be afforded seasonably, as means of relief. When the Holy Spirit comforteth a dejected saint, he doth it usually, by the instrumentality of some other saint. If the disconsolate believer, be providentially favoured with an opportunity, to open the case of his soul to another believer; the Holy Comforter will very seldom, in an immediate manner, create peace to him: He usually "*creates the fruit of the lips, peace* <sup>1</sup>." He will comfort him, by means of the presence and the speech of them, whom he hath comforted, and so qualified to be instruments of consolation to him <sup>2</sup>. Faithful Ministers of the gospel, especially, are helpers of the Christian's joy. But how can they be helpful to it, in the case of a disquieted Christian, who stands most in need of their help, if he do not afford them an opportunity? How can they answer objections, resolve doubts, or loose, as one expresses it, the knots of conscience, if these be not proposed to them?

Moreover, the disconsolate believer, should not forget to request the fervent prayers, not only of him, to whom he has disclosed the condition of his soul, but of other Christians, with whom he is acquainted. Some have observed that, those be-

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lvii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. i. 6.

lievers, in former times, who were the most accustomed, to request the aid of each other's prayers, were commonly the most flourishing Christians; and that, those who neglected this part of their duty, were usually the most languishing and hesitating. If "the effectual fervent prayer," even of one "righteous man, availeth much"; how much more, will the prayers of many such, avail !

17. Finally, If he would attain pure consolation, he must *not expect it from the means*, which it is his duty to employ. Let him use diligently, all the means of Divine appointment, and especially, those explained above; but let him take heed, that he do not trust in them, nor in his using of them, for the smallest degree of comfort. He ought to use them as diligently, as if he were to merit by it, not merely spiritual consolation, but even eternal life; and at the same time, to trust as little in them, and in his use of them, as if he had never known nor used, so much as one of them. His employing of them is a duty, which he is bound to regard, in point of performance, and to renounce, in point of dependance. He is, in his constant use of them, to rely for consolation, *only* upon the Lord Jesus, and upon God in Him, as the God of all comfort<sup>u</sup>. If he would recover a peaceful serenity of mind, he must renounce all confidence in his use of means, and expect consolation only from his God, and Saviour: saying, "Ashur shall not save me; neither will I say any more to the work of my hands, Ye are my gods. What have

<sup>s</sup> James v. 16.<sup>t</sup> Acts xii. 12.<sup>u</sup> Ps. lxii. 5.

I to do any more with idols<sup>w</sup>? He may expect all necessary comfort, *in* his diligent use of the means; but no comfort, *from* it. He must not presume to think, that his utmost diligence in employing them, will give him, either a meritorious, or a pactional, title to holy consolation. Spiritual comfort is a free gift, a gift of grace; and all the appointed means of attaining it, are means of grace. There is, indeed, a tendency in those means, to comfort the disquieted believer, who diligently uses them: it is not, however, any virtue in them, nor in his use of them; but it is the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying them, that imparteth all the comfort. He ought not, therefore, as Christians in spiritual trouble, too often do, to promise himself relief, by such and such a duty, at this or that time, or place: for if his expectation be not answered, (and it would indeed be a wonder if it should,) he will be ready to conclude, that the promise of God faileth, and that the disappointment, especially if repeated, is a sure indication, that the Lord hath cast him off for ever. This, instead of bringing peace or comfort to his troubled soul, will contribute greatly, to plunge it into still deeper perplexity, and to enchain it the faster, under perturbation and terror.

Thus, I have endeavoured to point out the means, which the disconsolate believer should chiefly employ, in order to regain his spiritual comfort. If he persevere in the diligent use of them, and in complying with the advices concerning them, given in this Chapter; he shall, through

<sup>w</sup> Hos. xiv. 3, 8.

grace, as soon as it will subserve the glory of his God and Saviour, and the sanctification of his own soul, recover holy consolation. He perhaps may never, whilst he remains in this valley of tears, experience *rapturous* joy ; but he shall, by the grace of the Lord Jesus, recover solid tranquillity, and sweet satisfaction of mind. “ In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began <sup>x</sup>,” his soul, by the consoling influences of the Holy Comforter, shall enjoy a calm and pleasing resignation, in all things, to the holy will of his redeeming God.

FROM the foregoing particulars, it appears clearly, that disconsolate saints have *no allowance* from the Lord Jesus, to *refuse* to be comforted, or to harden themselves in sorrow. The holier any of the saints are, they are, when under desertion, usually the more troubled. The more they love their God and Saviour, the more does it trouble them to want the light of his gracious countenance ; the more are they afraid lest they sin, and the more are they troubled because they have sinned ; the more are they disquieted by a sense of his paternal displeasure, and the more are they overwhelmed by the dread of his avenging wrath. Still, however, they must not yield to despondency, nor harden themselves in sorrow <sup>y</sup> ; but, on the contrary, they should exert themselves, in using the means of attaining holy tranquillity of mind. To persist obstinately in refusing to be comforted, will provoke the Lord to proceed in the controversy, and

<sup>x</sup> Tit. i. 2.

<sup>y</sup> Job vi. 10.



to sink their souls still deeper, in the waters of trouble.

Ought the believer, when he is troubled in mind, diligently to search out the particular sin or sins, which have provoked his heavenly Father, to hide his face from him? Let him not hence conclude, that he will, in *that condition*, succeed in searching for his *graces*, or evidences of personal interest in Christ. Whilst he is walking in the darkness of spiritual trouble, it will be to little purpose for him to spend his time, in searching for evidences of his being in a state of grace: for during *that time*, they are wrapped up in darkness, and cannot be discerned. He may sooner expect, to see his face in troubled waters, than to see his evidences for heaven, when his soul is troubled and covered with darkness. The only thing, which he can at that time, do to good purpose, is, to intrust the salvation of his soul to Jesus Christ, and to trust and plead *absolute* promises. Times of desertion and of temptation, are rather seasons for mourning, and trusting; and seeking the Lord, than for judging the state of the soul. To search at such times, for remaining corruptions in the heart, is one of the means of recovering spiritual comfort; but to try to find evidences of grace in it, when they are veiled with darkness, is the way to sink the deeper, in the waters of trouble.

Is trusting in Christ, the *principal* mean of recovering spiritual consolation? Let the disconsolate Christian, then, be exhorted and entreated to *trust* in Him. O let him endeavour, to come anew, to come without delay, to come as a sinner, to come with all his burthens, all his griefs, all his

fears, and cordially to trust, that the infinitely compassionate Saviour will save, and comfort him. Resisting every unbelieving thought, and every suggestion that would disquiet his soul, let him trust in the mercy of the Lord Jesus, and not be afraid. Let him come as he is, and place the confidence of his heart in the dear Redeemer, for all the salvation, and all the consolation, which are presented to him, in the offers and promises of the gospel. Let him trust with firm confidence, in the Saviour, for salvation to himself in particular; not only, because it is necessary for his comfort to do so, but because it is his *duty*, his first, his main duty. O if he could but be persuaded, to rely with assured confidence on the Lord Jesus, peace and joy, would soon be restored to his troubled soul! He would find the exercise of trusting in Christ, to be most profitable to himself, and most pleasing to God. O Christian, trust resolutely in the blessed Redeemer, and persist in trusting, till comfort come. Apply promises and take the comfort of them. Suck, and be satisfied with those breasts of consolation.

But some dejected Christian will say, 'I see *no right that I have*, to trust in Christ for salvation to myself; and therefore it would be presumption in me, so much as to attempt it.' To this I would answer: You conclude, it would appear, that you have no right to trust in him; because you can at present, see no good qualifications *in yourself*, to give you a right. But you were informed above, that your right to trust in Christ for salvation, is *not* founded upon any good quality in yourself; but, upon the offer, the call, the commandment to

believe on his name, and the promise ; all directed, in the gospel, to you as a sinner of mankind. These afford you, an ample, a perfect, a sufficient, warrant to believe in him ; and nothing in yourself, can render that warrant more complete, than it already is. It is nothing within you, but it is those things in the gospel without you, that give you all the right that you need, to trust anew in Jesus. To say, then, that you have no right to intrust your salvation to him, or, that it would be presumption in you to trust him, is direct unbelief. Whether you believe it or not, you have in the gospel, a full, an unchangeable right, to trust as a lost sinner, in the almighty Saviour, for all your salvation. And nothing which is good in yourself, can afford you the smallest right ; for all that is good in you, is either in faith, or consequent on faith ; but nothing of it can be *previous* to faith.

Another, perhaps, is ready to say, ‘ I cannot trust in Christ, for I know not if I be elected to salvation.’ You *cannot* know that you have been elected, till *after* you have trusted in him. Your election to salvation, forms no part of your revealed warrant, to trust in Jesus for salvation. Your warrant is that which was mentioned above. Your ignorance then of your election, cannot lessen that warrant, and your knowledge of your election, cannot add to it. The offers and invitations of the gospel, are not directed to men as elect sinners, but—as sinners of mankind. Although, therefore, you do not know, that you are a sinner elected ; yet, since you know, that you are a sinner of Adam’s race, the offers and calls are address-

ed to you ; and they afford you an authentic right, to place the confidence of your heart in Christ, for all the blessings of salvation. As you cannot know, that you are elected, before you venture to trust in Christ ; so neither can you know, that you are *not* elected. Your present duty therefore is, to approach, and, upon the ample warrant afforded you in the gospel, to trust firmly in the Lord Jesus, for all salvation to yourself in particular. So shall you, by believing and walking in Him, know your election of God. You can never know, that God hath ordained you to eternal life, otherwise, than by knowing experimentally, that he hath ordained you to believe <sup>2</sup>. You are bound to believe, before you know your particular election, and in order to know it ; and also, because it is the *will* of God, that you should believe.

A third is ready to object thus, ‘ I am afraid that, I have no personal interest in Christ and his salvation.’ If you cannot perceive, that the Lord Jesus hath already given you, a saving interest in himself, trust, as you were directed above, that he now saveth you ; or, in other words, that he *now giveth you*, a personal interest in his salvation. Trust that he giveth you an interest, in order to *see and feel*, that he *hath* given it. The more ignorant you are, of your interest in the Saviour, the more need you have to trust, that he granteth you a saving interest in himself. You must not excuse yourself from trusting for it, because you do not see and feel that you have it ; but you ought to trust for it, in order to see and feel that you possess it. Instead then.

<sup>2</sup> John vi. 37.

of saying, 'I dare not confide in Jesus for salvation, because I fear that I have no interest in salvation;' you should, on the contrary, say, 'Because I have a revealed warrant to do it, I will cordially trust, that He giveth me salvation, and that he will in due time, favour me with a sense of my personal interest in it.' You must not seek to feel, in order to believe; but you are to believe, in order to feel<sup>a</sup>.

Another, perhaps, will be reasoning thus, 'All who believe in Christ, rely upon the promises; but no promise so comes to me, as to be *impressed with power* on my mind: promises are not given me, and therefore it would be presumption in me, to apply them and rest upon them.' You seem to think that, a powerful impression of some promise, on a man's mind, is the *ground* of his right, to take and to trust that promise; and that, because you experience no such impression of any promise, you have no right to apply any. But this would be, to build your faith, upon your *feeling* of the promises; or, to make the sensible impression of them upon your mind, your ground of right to apply and trust them. A powerful impression of a promise, made by the Holy Spirit, upon your mind and memory, in a time of need, is indeed an encouragement to you, to apply and trust that promise; but it forms no part of your *warrant* to do so. It is the *offer of all* the promises, in and with Christ, to you, and the *call and command* to accept that offer, that afford you a right, to trust in Him, and to apply and trust all the promises in him. The in-

<sup>a</sup> Eph. i. 13.

ward impression cannot add to, and the want of it, cannot lessen your warrant. Your duty then is, to apply and trust the promises, not as powerfully suggested to, or impressed on your mind, but as offered or directed to you, in the gospel. One reason, perhaps, of your not being favoured with comfortable impressions of promises, is, your not having trusted in the Holy Comforter, for such impressions; and your not having honoured the promises themselves, by trusting them, upon the Divine warrant which lies in the word without you. Know then that, in order to holy consolation, you must study to trust Divine promises, not upon the ground of their being impressed, but upon that of their being *offered* to you.

Some other disconsolate soul may be saying, ‘Alas, I have a dead, hard, and deceitful heart, which greatly discourages me from trusting, that the holy One of God, will ever visit me with his salvation. How can I hope, that he will save and comfort such an uncommon sinner as I am?’ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom, says our Apostle, I am chief<sup>b</sup>. Now you should accept, or believe that faithful saying, with application to yourself, and say, ‘It is indeed true, that I am an uncommon sinner, yea, the very chief of sinners; but it is equally true, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save such sinners, and why not—to save *me*? My heart, alas, is very dead, hard, and deceitful; but the deeper, the depravity of it is, the more,

<sup>b</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15.

will the power and grace of Christ be glorified, in saving me from that depravity. I will therefore venture to trust, that He will glorify the exceeding riches of his grace, in saving me from all the sin that dwelleth in me, and from all the iniquity that has been committed by me.' It is your duty, to humble and to loath yourself much, for the evils of your heart, and of your life; but it is your sin, to let them discourage you in the least, from attempting any one of your duties. You ought, indeed, to be humbled for them, in the greatest degree; but you must not be deterred by them, even in the smallest degree, from your duty, especially, from the first and great duty of believing in Jesus Christ. If you be, in your own sight, the chief of sinners; even this, must not discourage you from the chief, the first of all duties. The deeper, your sense of the plague of your heart, is, this should, instead of discouraging you, excite you the more, to perform diligently the duty of trusting in Christ, especially for sanctification.

One, it may be, will be saying, 'Why should I be exhorted to trust in Christ? I have, times without number, been guilty of backsliding, both in my heart, and in my life. I have frequently resolved to be more circumspect, and more diligent in the spiritual performance of every duty; but I have, upon the very slightest temptation, acted contrary to my resolutions, by *relapsing, once and again, into the same sin.*' You have, indeed, much reason to exercise godly sorrow, and self-abhorrence; but, no reason to be so dismayed, as to cease trusting in the Saviour, or to be so dejected, as to refuse to be comforted. You have much need to exercise re-

pentance; but, as much need to exercise that reliance on Christ, from which, true repentance flows: and it is as great a sin, to suffer your backsliding to deter you from the latter, as from the former. No past sin, however aggravated, must be pled in excuse, for omitting a present duty. The Lord hath graciously promised, to keep you from *total and final* backsliding; but, nowhere, as far as I know, to secure you against *partial* backsliding, or against relapsing, in the hour of temptation, into the same sins of infirmity, of which you have formerly repented. Abraham was suffered, again and again to dissemble; Lot, to be twice overcome with wine; John, to be twice guilty of worshipping the angel; and Jehosaphat, to join affinity with Ahab, and afterwards, to join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly. It is not indeed usual with God, to leave his dear children, to relapse often into enormous transgressions; but he suffers them, for their humiliation, to relapse into sins of infirmity. Though your backsliding, then, should humble you to the dust; yet it should not, for a moment, discourage you, from the great duty of trusting in Jesus Christ. Harken to these gracious, these cheering invitations:—"Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you:" "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings c." Apply, and trust, and plead, these consoling promises:—"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely d:" "I will seek that which was lost,

c Jer. iii. 12, 22.

d Hos. xiv. 4.



and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick <sup>e</sup>.”

Another may be ready to say, ‘How can my heart, which frequently revolts from God, be *up-right* before him? How can that heart be sound, which is often sore? I have bewailed my sin, and resolved against it; but no sooner am I tempted to it, than, alas, I often *fall* before the temptation. Indeed, I have much reason to dread, that I shall, one day, *perish* by the hands of sin and Satan.’ Your bewailing and striving against your sin, are a good evidence that, though sin sometimes prevails against you, yet it does not reign in you; that, though it rebels, yet it does not rule. It is a *willing* obedience to the commands of the body of sin, which evidences the soul to be under the dominion of sin. You shall never perish by the hands of sin and Satan, until God first forsake you, totally and finally. But He hath graciously promised that, he “will never leave you, nor forsake you <sup>f</sup>.” The sheep of Christ, hear his voice, and follow him, as you desire and endeavour to do. Now, hear what he promiseth concerning them: “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand <sup>g</sup>.” “The God of peace, will bruise Satan under your feet shortly <sup>h</sup>.” “Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler <sup>i</sup>.” The

<sup>e</sup> Ezek. xxxiv. 16. <sup>f</sup> Heb. xiii. 5. <sup>g</sup> John x. 27—29.

<sup>h</sup> Rom. xvi. 20. <sup>i</sup> Ps. xci. 3.

more, your spiritual enemies are threatening to destroy you, the more should you apply and trust those promises of salvation. The more frequently, it is suggested to you, that iniquity will be your ruin; you ought to take occasion, the more frequently, and the more resolutely, to trust that, your almighty Redeemer will come and save you; that, "He will deliver you from every evil work, and will preserve you to his heavenly kingdom <sup>k</sup>."

Some discouraged soul will be saying, 'How can I venture to trust, that the holy Jesus will perform the part of a Saviour, to me, when I know that my iniquities against him, are *innumerable, and aggravated in an uncommon degree*?' For that very reason, you ought to be the more disposed, and the more determined, to trust in him for salvation from them. You must permit me to inform you, that, so far as your *desire* of salvation from the love and practice of iniquity, is *sincere*, you *do* resolve to rely upon Him for that salvation. Without this resolution, it will be impossible for you, to evidence to your conscience, the sincerity, either of your complaints of sin, or of your desires of salvation from it. In proportion as you do not fully resolve, and endeavour, to trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation from your sins, you *love* them; and your complaining of the number, and the greatness of them, is hypocritical. Besides, your *taking* occasion from your innumerable and great transgressions, to say, 'I dare not trust in the holy Jesus, for salvation,' shews that, you are wishing for some good thing, either in your heart, or

<sup>k</sup> 2 Tim iv. 18.

N 6

your life, to entitle you to trust in him. This, evidences the dreadful prevalence of a self-righteous spirit, as well as of unbelief, in you. You should consider that, the salvation of Jesus Christ, is infinitely free; and that, the more numerous, and the more heinous, your sins are, the more need you have of Him and of his salvation, and therefore the greater need to believe in him. If you could suppose, that the omnipotent Saviour, did never yet perform such a great work, as the saving of a sinner from sins, so innumerable, and so great as yours are; even this, could be *no just* obstacle to your trusting in Him; because the depth of his immense love, hath never yet been sounded<sup>1</sup>, and the greatness of his ability to save, hath never yet been searched out. He hath never yet done the utmost that he can do. Suppose the mountain of your innumerable sins, were so high, as, with its height, to reach, not only the clouds, but the throne of the Eternal Himself; suppose that, and another, and ten thousands of them, were piled up, and the whole cast into the abyss of redeeming love, and redeeming blood; the waters of that bottomless, that boundless ocean, would still be as high above them, as the heaven is high above the earth<sup>2</sup>.

Another perhaps is saying, 'I do not doubt the ability, but the *willingness* of Christ, to save me from my great transgressions.' If you believe his ability, you do in the *same* degree, believe his willingness: for, what is his willingness to save sinners, but his *moral* ability. To doubt his willing-

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iii. 18, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. ciii. 11.

ness, then, is to question his ability. Why doth he offer himself to you? why doth he invite, beseech, and even command you, to accept and trust in him for your salvation? and why doth he say in his promises to you, "*I will?*" but because he is *willing* to save you. Would he ever have made it your duty, to believe in him for salvation; or would he ever have said to you, "He that believeth not shall be damned;" if he had not been willing to give you salvation? Would he ever have said, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out;" or have complained that sinners "would not come to him, that they might have life;" if he had been unwilling, to receive and save them? Indeed, to disbelieve his willingness, is to make him—a liar; to say that he is not willing to save you, is, to blaspheme the kindness of his redeeming love, and the riches of his glorious grace. If you think, that he is willing to save other sinners, but not to save you; know that, this is one of Satan's whispers, entertained by your evil heart of unbelief; and that, it is not more injurious to the infinitely gracious Redeemer, to doubt even of his existence, than to doubt of his willingness, to save a lost sinner who desires to trust in him. O believe, with application to yourself, his infinite willingness. Trust, not only that he is willing to save you, but that he *will* save you; and say, with the holy Psalmist, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou *wilt* revive me;...and thy right hand shall save me<sup>a</sup>."

Some other desponding Christian may say, 'Alas!

<sup>a</sup> Ps. cxxxviii. 7

it will be in vain to urge *me*, to believe in Jesus ; for I dread that I have committed *the sin against the Holy Spirit*, which will never be forgiven.

That horrible sin appears, from various passages of Scripture compared, to include ; first, A wilful, malicious, and avowed, rejecting of the Saviour and of salvation by him, and that, after a manifest conviction of the truth of the gospel ; next, an avowed and obstinate opposing of the doctrines of the gospel ; and, lastly, an obstinate and spiteful scoffing at the religion of Jesus Christ, and the professors of it, attended sometimes with a rancorous persecution of them ; and all these, as consequences of a total and final apostacy, from the profession of Christianity. The man, who is guilty of that dreadful sin, is not merely an apostate, but a blaspheming apostate. And so horrible, is his enmity against Christ, and the way of salvation by him ; that he chooses rather to risk eternal damnation, than to be indebted to him for mercy. Now you may be assured, that you have not been guilty of this most atrocious sin ; if none but *yourself* complains of it ; if you are desirous of complete salvation by Jesus Christ ; if you are content, to be an eternal debtor to his redeeming grace ; if you are afraid, that you have been guilty of it ; if you are, in the smallest degree, grieved and troubled for the unbelief of your heart ; if you are grieved and ashamed, that so much sin is in your heart, and in your life ; and, if you wish, that the glory of sovereign and redeeming grace, may be illustriously displayed in your salvation.

One perhaps is disposed to say, ‘ I am *not humbled*, or at least *not humbled enough*, for my sins ;

and therefore, I dare not place confidence in Christ for his salvation.' You ought to know that true humiliation is, either a concomitant, or a consequent of saving faith, but is *not* a ground of it: it gives a man no right to trust in Christ; no title to the Divine acceptance, either of his person, or of his performances. It is, indeed, in the hand of the Spirit, a mean of rendering a man willing to trust in the Lord Jesus, and the more of it he attains, he is the more willing; but it affords him, no degree of warrant to trust in him: nor is it requisite that it should. For, by the offers and calls of the gospel, he already is fully warranted; so well warranted, that nothing in himself can either diminish, or increase, his warrant. When you then say that, you dare not trust in the Redeemer, because you are not sufficiently humbled; you thereby shew, that you are under the prevalence, both of unbelief, and of a legal spirit:—of *unbelief*; for you do not seem to believe that, by the offers, calls, and commands of God, you are sufficiently warranted to rely on Christ; but that, something *more* is requisite, to afford you a sufficient warrant:—of a *legal spirit*; for you regard humiliation, as that which must confer upon you, a *right* to trust in him; since, for want of it in a sufficient degree, you dare not intrust your salvation to him. But be assured that, you cannot recover holy consolation, till you come as you are, and place direct confidence in Jesus Christ, for all your salvation; and that, you cannot have more evangelical humiliation, till you first trust in Christ for it, and so receive it by faith, out of his fulness. The more of this humiliation, you attain, the more willing

will you be, to come as a sinner to the Saviour; but you cannot attain an increase of it, before you trust in Him for it, as a part of your salvation.

Another it may be with reason thus, 'I am *not sufficiently troubled*, for the heinous transgressions, of which I have been guilty; and therefore I dare not trust in the Holy One of God, for salvation from them.' But are you not already so troubled in mind, as to long for comfort? Are you not disquieted because you apprehend, that you are not troubled enough for your sins? Are not your transgressions a real source of trouble to you? But what think you of that trouble for sin, which keeps you from trusting in the only Saviour; which weakens your heart, and injures your health; which renders all your outward comforts unsavoury to you; and which disqualifies you, for the acceptable performance of your religious and moral duties? Is such trouble as that, desirable to you? is it not sinful? and do not you, by wishing for more of it, increase the number of your sins, and provoke the Lord to proceed in his controversy with you? Indeed, that distress of mind even for sin itself, which keeps you from coming to Christ, is more sinful, than it is possible for you to conceive; and it must be repented of, before you can experience pure consolation. That uneasiness of soul for sin, which indisposes a man to place confidence in Christ, for salvation from sin, is undoubtedly hypocritical and sinful. When a man is troubled for his other offences, but not for his greatest sin, the sin of refusing to trust in the blessed Saviour for salvation; he may assure himself, that such trouble is not of the right kind. Ge-

nuine trouble of mind for sin presses a man forward to Jesus Christ; and it is accompanied with frequent attempts to trust in him, for pardon and sanctification °.

Some one will say, ‘ But I am *so very unworthy* of Christ, and of his great salvation, that I fear He will not receive me, nor admit me to share in that salvation.’ Indeed, you are very unworthy, infinitely more unworthy, than any man or angel will ever be able to conceive. You are not only far, but *infinitely* far, from being able to deserve Christ and his great salvation. But it seems, you wish that you *could* deserve salvation, or at least, that you could merit the Saviour himself; or, if not salvation, nor the Saviour; that you could but merit the good will of the Saviour, and could so recommend yourself to his favour, as freely to claim and trust in him. But do not you hereby in effect declare, that you are under the prevalence of strong unbelief; that you do not believe, that salvation is altogether free, or, that “ eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord ?” You seem at present not to believe, that salvation is an infinitely free gift; that it is so free, as not to admit of the sinner’s offering the smallest price for it <sup>p</sup>; and that it is so great, as to be infinitely above the highest price, that he can ever afford to offer. And do not you likewise shew, that you are under the prevalence of a legal spirit; when you are averse from trusting in Christ, be-

° Hos. vi. 1—3. and xiv. 1—3. Jer. xxxi. 18—20.  
Ps. lxx. 3.

<sup>p</sup> Isa. lv. 1, 2.



cause you are not worthy of him, or, because you cannot recommend yourself to his favour? Are not you thereby leaning to the covenant of works? Do you think it possible, that Christ the inestimable gift of God, can be purchased with the money of your merits; or, that you can procure a title to that salvation, which is wholly of sovereign grace? Suppose you offered, but a single good thought for it; would not even that, mar the freeness of it, and obscure the glory of immensely rich grace, in the gift of it? Ah! Why do you try to find a cause in yourself, why the Lord Jesus should save you? Why do you seek to make merit, the object of redeeming grace and mercy? You are invited to “take the water of life *freely*.” why then are you discouraged, because you have nothing to pay for it? Why do you think it hard, that you are not allowed to put something of your own, into the scale, with the consummate righteousness of Jesus Christ, to make it full weight?

Another disconsolate soul is saying, ‘I cannot trust in Jesus for my salvation: I have *no ability* to believe in him.’ That is a common objection, but it amounts just to this;—a complaint that, however much Christ hath done for you, he hath not yet, advanced you to a state of independence on himself, nor set you free from your incapacity of doing any thing without him. But why should this be a ground of complaint? He knows that you cannot, by any power of your own, believe, or so much as think one good thought; and yet, he commands you to believe on him. But he nowhere commands you, to do it in your *own* strength.

He enjoins you, to “take hold of *his* strength<sup>1</sup>,” and to “be strong in the grace that is in Him<sup>2</sup>.” Instead then, of excusing yourself from trusting in the great Redeemer, because you cannot do it, by any strength of your own; you ought on the contrary to say, “I can do that, and all things else, through Christ which strengtheneth me<sup>3</sup>.” Although you are not able to trust cordially in him, by your own power; yet it is your *duty*, so to trust in him, and your *sin*, not to do it. You should therefore attempt it frequently, looking to himself for grace to enable you. Indeed to say, ‘I cannot trust in him,’ is almost the same as to say, ‘I will not: I will trust in man who *can* lie; but not, in God the Saviour who *can not* lie.’ Ah! what a heinous sin is this! You thereby presume to lay the blame of your unbelief, upon the holy Lord God. But your impotence, as it is *voluntary*, is wholly your own sin. Your inability consists, not so much in a mere want of executive power, as in the want of a willing mind. O do not imagine, that such inability<sup>\*</sup> will in the least, excuse you. Inability to discharge a just debt, excuses not a debtor. Though you do not *feel*, that Christ strengthens you, for believing or other spiritual exercises; yet your duty is, to *trust* that he strengthens you for them. Your not feeling the habit of faith in you, will never excuse you from attempting the exercise of faith. Although you cannot cordially believe in Christ, until the Holy Spirit work faith in you; yet, you should try so

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxvii. 5.<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 1.<sup>3</sup> Philip. iv. 13.

to believe in him, *before you feel* the Spirit working it in you.

To conclude: A Christian, under extreme dejection of spirit, will be ready even to say, ‘In my present doleful condition, I find myself neither able nor *willing*, to trust in Jesus for salvation.’ What!—Are you not willing to trust in Him?—not willing, to be saved and comforted by him?—not willing, to afford him an opportunity of shewing, in your salvation, the exceeding riches of his grace? He, with all his salvation, and with all the joy of that salvation, is freely and particularly offered to you<sup>c</sup>; and you are peremptorily commanded to accept him, and to place your trust in him<sup>d</sup>. And are you still unwilling to trust in him? The truth is, you are in some degree, either willing to trust him, and his promises of salvation; or willing to quit, henceforth, all right to him, all interest in him, and to forego all expectation from him. Are you then willing, to bid an eternal adieu to the only Saviour, and, in testimony of your doing so, to transcribe and sign this Declaration:—‘I, A. B. do hereby, in the presence of God the Judge of all, declare, that I henceforth renounce, and that for ever, all my part in the Saviour and in his salvation; and that for the future, I will never allow myself to hope in him, either for salvation or consolation?’ Now are you indeed willing, to subscribe this Renunciation? If you are *not*; you bear false witness against yourself, when you say that you are *not* willing, to trust in Christ Jesus for salvation: for you are, either willing in

<sup>c</sup> John iii. 16. and vi. 32. Rev. xxii. 17. <sup>d</sup> 1 John iii. 23.

some degree to trust him, or willing to renounce him ? Is your heart indeed willing, to be for ever separate from the Lord Jesus ? Or is it matter of indifference to you, whether He save you with an everlasting salvation, or punish you with everlasting destruction ? No : it cannot be.

¶ I am aware, that even an unregenerate man will refuse, in a deliberate and formal manner, to renounce for ever, his claim to the Saviour ; and yet continue far from being willing, truly to believe in him for all his salvation. But there is a great difference between the refusal of the careless sinner, so to renounce Christ, and that of the disconsolate saint. The reason why the secure sinner, will refuse to abandon for ever, his claim to the only Saviour, is merely his fear of eternal torment ; whereas, the reason why the disquieted saint, will tremble at the thought of renouncing his part in him, is not so much, his dread of eternal torment, as, of being for ever separated from the blessed God, and for ever deprived of holy conformity to Him. The unwillingness of the disconsolate Christian, to renounce for ever, his part in the great Redeemer, arises from a principle of grace in his heart ; and it implies a proportional degree of willingness to trust in Him, for all the parts of his salvation ; though the Christian be not able, under trouble of mind, to discern this willingness in himself. As to the unregenerate sinner, he may, indeed, be willing to trust in the Lord Jesus, for preservation from hell ; but he cannot, so long as he continues unregenerate, be cordially willing to rely upon him, for salvation from all sin : and therefore let him not flatter himself, that he is, in the smallest degree, willing to exercise true faith.

## CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE MEANS, WHICH BELIEVERS ARE TO EMPLOY,  
IN ORDER TO ATTAIN INCREASING COMFORT.

**I**T frequently happens, not only in the experience of young converts, but also in that of advanced believers, newly delivered from mental trouble, especially, if their preceding distress and sorrow were very deep; that the joy which succeeds these, is lively and almost rapturous. We are not however to imagine, that they are all equally joyful, or that the joy which any of them feels, will always continue: It will rather subside, and settle into a peaceful serenity, or a pleasing tranquillity of mind. They, indeed, “go out usually with *joy*; but afterwards they will be led forth with *peace*.” And though their joy is no longer extatic, as before; yet, it becomes more pure and spiritual, or rather, subsides into a peaceful and refreshing tranquillity of soul. This peace or serenity of mind, as was observed above, is indeed the lowest degree of spiritual consolation, yet still it is real and solid comfort. And although it is the office of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to maintain and increase it in the souls of believers, and in every time of need, to elevate it to joy, or even to triumph; yet it is ordinarily, in their diligent use of appointed means, that he affords them the influences of consolation, requisite for these purposes. If therefore the man who believes, and who experiences holy consolation, would retain this comfort, and rise to higher degrees of it; he must, in

dependance on the grace of Christ, diligently employ, especially the following means :

1. He must study *to increase in the habit and exercise of faith, and to be more resolute and express in his actings of faith.*

It will be necessary that he give all diligence, *to grow in the habit and exercise of true faith.* “ We which have believed,” says an Apostle, “ do enter into rest <sup>w</sup>.” He whose heart trusteth in Christ, and relieth on the promise of eternal life, as offered to him in the gospel, does thereby enter already into spiritual rest, or holy tranquillity of soul : and the more, he trusts with firm confidence in the Lord Jesus, for eternal life to himself, the more of spiritual rest, does he experience. Hereby, he enters further and further into rest ; and, notwithstanding all temptations and troubles, from sin, Satan, and the world, he attains increasing ease and comfort of soul. He comes labouring and heavy laden, to Jesus Christ, and He giveth him rest <sup>x</sup>. Jesus giveth rest to his conscience, in his own blood and righteousness, and rest to his heart, in God as his God and portion. Accordingly Isaiah says, “ Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, *Heb.* in peace, peace, whose mind is stayed on thee ; because he trusteth in thee <sup>y</sup>.” When the Holy Spirit enableth him, to trust with unsuspecting confidence, in the faithful Redeemer, for all salvation to himself in particular, and to rely on the promises as offered to him ; the very acting of this faith sets his mind at rest : he is, through the power of the Holy Spirit, “ filled with joy and

<sup>w</sup> Heb. iv. 3.

<sup>x</sup> Matth. xi. 28.

<sup>y</sup> Isa. xxvi. 3.

peace in believing <sup>a</sup>." Committing himself, with all his spiritual and temporal concerns, to Christ Jesus, and trusting that Jesus will save him, and uphold him, and manage for him; his soul is, in proportion to the strength of his faith, set at ease. "He rests in the Lord, and waits patiently for him <sup>a</sup>;" not only because it is his duty, but because it is the instituted mean of his attaining an increase of consolation. Knowing that, it is the *joy* of the Lord, that is his strength for the spiritual performance of every duty; he studies to increase in the lively exercise of faith, in order that "believing, he may rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory <sup>b</sup>." Indeed, faith is the principal mean, not only of recovering, but of increasing, holy consolation. The way to console is to settle the heart. The increase of comfort, therefore, will be according to the increase of faith. If the believer would advance in pure consolation, let him endeavour diligently, and constantly, to exercise faith: let him "*labour* to enter into that rest <sup>c</sup>." To bring his heart, to the habitual exercise of trusting simply in the Saviour, will indeed cost him many hard struggles, and hot conflicts with his remaining unbelief: but still he must labour, not only to exercise, but to increase his faith; and that, by acting faith more frequently, and by trusting in Christ at all times, for an increase of it. He must endeavour, so to advance in the daily exercise of cordial, and direct confidence in Jesus for salvation, as thereby to receive from him, a daily in-

<sup>a</sup> Rom. xv. 13.<sup>a</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 7.<sup>b</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.<sup>c</sup> Heb. iv. 11.

crease of holiness: for the more of holiness, he receives, the more of holy comfort, he will experience. Let him also renew frequently, his application of the blood of Jesus to his conscience, for purging away the guilt which he is daily contracting. The Apostle Paul informs us that, “The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost<sup>d</sup>.” From the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ, applied by faith, cometh peace, peace of conscience, as well as peace with God, and from peace, issueth joy. Hence it is evident, that the way to advance in spiritual peace and joy, is to increase in that faith, which is a relying on Christ and his righteousness, for justification and complete salvation. Moreover, the principal, if not the only way, in which, the Holy Comforter administers consolation to believers, is, by testifying of Christ to them. It is, by shewing them his loveliness and love, his ability and willingness to save, his suitableness and faithfulness; and, by enabling them, so to confide in him for salvation to themselves, as to rejoice in the hope of that salvation. It is likewise, by enabling them to appropriate God in Christ, and to place increasing confidence in Him. This was David’s exercise, in order to attain more comfort: “I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, ‘Thou art *my* God.’” And the happy consequence of it, he expresses thus: “Blessed be the Lord; for he hath shewed me, his marvellous kindness in a strong city<sup>e</sup>.”

If the believer would attain increasing consolation, he must likewise be *more resolute and express*,

<sup>d</sup> Rom. xiv. 17.

<sup>e</sup> Ps. xxxi. 14, 21.



in his actings of faith. It will be necessary for him to be resolute, in looking away from every other object of dependance, to Jesus. He must habitually and peremptorily resolve, to trust simply in Him ; and, in full assurance of faith, to intrust all his salvation, and all his concerns, to His care. By thus casting his burden upon the Lord Jesus, and trusting that He will make all things, work together for good to him ; his heart will become light and cheerful : he shall be freed from a thousand anxieties, which otherwise would disquiet and distract his soul. The more distinct and explicit, the actings of his faith are ; the more peace, will they bring into his conscience, and the more joy, into his heart. When his actings of faith, are so lively and express, that he becomes habitually *conscious* of them ; he thereby, sits down to a rich feast of inward tranquillity, and even of spiritual delight. When his faith, under the influences of the Holy Spirit, is so direct, and so particular in its exercise, as to meet Christ in the promise, heart to heart, and eye to eye ; it is like a rod of Myrtle in the hand of the traveller, which, as some say, revives his spirits, and enables him to proceed, without feeling himself weary. He thereby dwells in him, who is the Consolation of Israel, the Fountain from which, all the streams of ineffable delight do flow. Let every believer, then, study diligently to be more distinct, particular, and express, in his exercise of faith. Let him endeavour daily, to be more and more express, especially, in his trusting in Christ, for salvation from the love, power, and practice of every sin. This appropriating and express exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus, is graciously and absolutely

promised. “ Surely, *shall one say*, In the Lord, have I righteousness and strength <sup>f</sup>. ” “ I will say, It is my people ; and *they shall say*, The Lord is my God <sup>g</sup>. ”

2. It will be necessary that he trust frequently in Christ, not only for salvation in general, but for *an increase of comfort* in particular. Let him continue, humbly and firmly to trust that, the Lord Jesus will not only save him, but “ comfort him on every side ; ” and that, He will not merely preserve and increase in his soul, the *habit* of spiritual joy, but that, he will favour him in every time of need, with an increase even of *sensible* comfort. He must endeavour, in every condition, and in the diligent use of all other instituted means, to trust that God in Christ, the God of consolation, will “ fill him with all joy and peace in believing ; ” that, Jesus the Consolation of Israel, will “ speak comfortably to him <sup>h</sup>, ” and “ will never leave him comfortless <sup>i</sup> ; ” and that, the Holy Spirit the Comforter will, by His inhabitation and influence, fill his soul with an increase of holy consolation ;—and, in every season of need, it will be unto him according to his faith. Instead of refusing to be comforted, by raising captious and frivolous objections, against the consolation which in the gospel, is offered and promised him ; he should, upon the warrant of the gospel-offer, habitually desire, and constantly rely upon Christ for, a higher degree of it, according to the promise. He ought never to forget, that the comfort of the Holy Spirit, is one

<sup>f</sup> Isa. xlv. 24.

<sup>h</sup> Hos. ii. 14.

<sup>g</sup> Zech. xiii. 9.

<sup>i</sup> John xiv. 18.

of the fruits of trusting in the Lord <sup>k</sup>. It is a part of the office of faith, to accept, and to hand, spiritual comfort to the holy soul. If faith therefore be strong, and frequently in exercise, such a soul will have strong consolation. If faith increase, in its habit, and in the frequency of its exercise, holy comfort will in proportion increase. Let the believer therefore trust at all times, in the Lord Jesus, for increasing consolation. Let him see that he take comfort, rather from Christ discovered, than from his own discoveries of him; and that he live comfortably, upon Christ himself, rather than upon his own experience of Christ. He should encourage himself continually, in his God and Saviour. Amidst all his inward and outward troubles, he must, by the frequent actings of particular trust, derive strong consolation, from the life, the death, the resurrection, the intercession, the covenant, the words, the offices, the victories, and the relations, of Jesus Christ. He must also trust that, the blessed Spirit loveth him; and that, as his gracious Comforter, "He will abide with him for ever, and will bring all things to his remembrance," that are necessary to comfort him <sup>l</sup>.

Believer, if thou wouldst advance in true consolation, thou must always trust that, whenever the Lord Jesus shall take from thee, any of thy present comforts; it will be, only to make room for better and sweeter comforts. Intrust all thy temporal comforts, without the least anxiety, to thy faithful Redeemer, and He will render them doubly sweet to thee; or if he shall take any of them

<sup>k</sup> Prov. xvi. 20.

<sup>l</sup> John xiv. 26.

from thee, he will restore them again with much advantage, either in kind, or in value. Beware of relying, partly on Christ, and partly, on the creature, for thy comfort. Derive *all* thy comforts of every kind, by the direct actings of faith, from Christ in the promise, and derive them *only* from Him. It is the character of the true circumcision, that “they rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh<sup>m</sup>.” “If the sufferings of Christ,” or sufferings in conformity to him, shall at any time, abound in thee, thy “consolation also will abound by Christ<sup>n</sup>.” Look therefore to Jesus, the glorious Sun of righteousness, for the light of consolation, and not to thyself; and charge it often upon thy soul, to rejoice in Him. When thou usest diligently, the appointed means of advancing in spiritual comfort, do not forget to trust that, he will abundantly bless them for that purpose: so shall they prove means, to thy soul, of increasing in holy consolation.

3. If the believer would retain his comfort, and rise to higher degrees of it, he must *exercise constantly, the hope of eternal life*. As hope is a mean of recovering, so it is a mean of increasing, spiritual comfort. The more, therefore, that a good man “abounds in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit;” the more shall he “*rejoice*, in the hope of the glory of God<sup>o</sup>.” Having “fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before him,” let him “shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope,” that many especially of the first Christians shewed; and then he shall, like them, “have

<sup>m</sup> Philip. iii. 3.<sup>n</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 5.<sup>o</sup> Rom. v. 2.

strong consolation <sup>p</sup>.” If he hope continually, for the full and endless fruition of God, and of the Lamb, in the heavenly world; he shall thereby, be weaned from undue attachment to the present world, and so shall be preserved from being much affected, either by the smiles, or the frowns, of worldly men. If he exercise daily, “the lively hope of that inheritance, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him;” and build his hope upon the sure, the immoveable, foundation laid in Zion, remote from all the changes experienced in himself; he shall thereby, “hold fast the confidence, and the *rejoicing* of the hope, firm unto the end <sup>q</sup>.” Were the believer to exercise constantly, a lively and firm expectation of sufficient grace in time, and of consummate blessedness through eternity; it would be a special mean of exciting, and promoting, ineffable delight in his soul: it would fill his heart, with overflowings of holy gratitude, and his lips, with expressions of joy and triumph. In proportion as his hope is grounded, and frequently exercised, on the love of God, on the promise of eternal life, and on the righteousness, grace, and faithfulness, of the glorious Redeemer; it brings more and more of eternal life, and of that heavenly delight which forms a part of it, into his soul. That living hope is from above, and in proportion as it is strengthened, and frequently exercised, it elevates the holy soul, to the things which are above. The believer, when he is exercising it, lives in a joyful expectation, and a sweet anticipation, of the ineffable

<sup>p</sup> Heb. vi. 11, 18.

<sup>q</sup> Heb. iii. 6.

and endless pleasures, which are at God's right hand. Hope settles and cheers the heart. It disposes the Christian, patiently and quietly to wait upon the Lord, for every promised blessing<sup>r</sup>. It leaves the season, and the manner, of bestowing any promised blessing, to that Divine Redeemer, who is infinitely wise, gracious, and faithful. True hope is the assured expectation that, although Christ may *seem* to delay long, yet he will certainly come with every promised, every necessary, blessing; and that, he will not defer, a single moment longer than the time appointed in the everlasting covenant.

Moreover, the exercise of hope promotes holy consolation; inasmuch as it is a mean of purifying the soul from sin, that greatest enemy of spiritual comfort<sup>s</sup>. When a holy man is enabled to hope, that he shall abide in Christ, and endure to the end; that he shall continue to receive, from the fulness of Christ, rich supplies of sanctifying grace, to enable him, faithfully to keep his commandments; that he shall consequently grow in grace, and in the saving knowledge of Jesus-Christ; that he shall be graciously upheld under, and delivered from, all the afflictions which may still await him; that he shall at the appointed time, be prepared to die in peace, and to pass over with joy, into the embraces of his dear Redeemer; and, that he shall be with Him to behold his glory, for evermore<sup>t</sup>;—this hope, fills his heart with inexpressible joy:

<sup>r</sup> Rom. viii. 25.

<sup>s</sup> 1 John iii. 3.

<sup>t</sup> 'An eminent minister, after having been silent in company, a considerable time, and being asked the reason, signified that the powers of his mind, had been solemnly absorbed with the thought of everlasting hap-

it diffuses a delightful perfume of comfort, over his soul.

4. It will be requisite for the same purpose, that he *daily advance in love* to the Lord Jesus, and to God in him. The Christian's love to Christ, is the immediate principle of his delighting or joying in him. To advance therefore in supreme love to Christ, is the way to increase in holy joy. The apostle Paul, in describing the fruit of the Spirit, mentions joy and peace, in immediate connection with love<sup>u</sup>. And the Lord Jesus himself, when he was comforting his disciples, said, "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him<sup>v</sup>." Love is a pleasant, a cheering affection. Those believers, therefore, who excel others in love to Christ Jesus, do commonly surpass others also, in spiritual comfort. The exercise of supreme love to Him, and to God in him, diffuseth a sacred sweetness over the soul. Whether it be a love of desire to him, when he is absent, or of delight in him, when he is present; still, in proportion to the strength, and the exercise of it, it sweetly refreshes and invigorates the soul. "There is no fear in love," says the apostle John; "but perfect love casteth out fear<sup>w</sup>." Although it is always attended, with a holy and filial fear of displeasing God; yet, in proportion to the degree and exercise of it in the soul, it banishes

piness. "O my friends," said he, with an energy which surprised all present, "consider what it is, to be for ever with the Lord—for ever, for ever, for ever!" Buck's Anecdotes, Vol. I. p. 95.

<sup>u</sup> Gal. v. 22.

<sup>v</sup> John xiv. 23.

<sup>w</sup> 1 John iv. 18.

all slavish, diffident, and disquieting fear of him. Indeed, when the ardour of love decays, and the exercise of it fails, distressing fear usually arises; but when love is revived, and is vigorous in its exercise upon its transcendently glorious, and amiable Object, such fear usually vanishes, and gives place to holy consolation in the soul. The vigorous exercise of ardent love to his dear Redeemer; excited, by believing views of His infinite loveliness in himself, and of his immense love to him; tends, through grace, to fill the mind of the believer with a pleasing tranquillity. If loving *any* object, has in its nature, a tendency to make the person who loves, take pleasure in the company of the object beloved, notwithstanding all the infirmities, which cleave to that object; what inexpressible pleasure, must a saint experience, in loving Him who “*is altogether lovely!*” All the delights of worldly men, are but like the toys of children, in comparison of the pleasure of supreme love to the Lord Jesus, and to a God of love in Him. The apostle Paul informs us that, “*love thinketh no evil*.” Love of God doth, in proportion to the degree of it, think no evil of him: it feareth no evil from him. It indulgeth not evil surmises, or groundless jealousies of him. “*He who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him*.” He counts it his highest pleasure, to please Him, and his greatest joy, to have intimate communion with him. He delighteth in him, as his Friend, his Father, and his God, as his only portion, and his exceeding joy: and the more he delights in the Lord, the more of

1 Cor. xiii. 5.

2 1 John iv. 16.



holy consolation, does he experience. Believer, see that thou advance daily, in supreme and ardent affection, to God in Christ, to all of God, and all of Christ: love especially the holiness, the will, and the glory of Christ. Let thy soul cleave continually to Him; and it will comfort thee greatly, to think of him, and of his immense, and amazing love to thee. To advance in supreme love to thy dear Redeemer, will, notwithstanding all the afflictions, which may henceforth befall thee in thy lot, render thee capable of increasing in heavenly consolation. Difficult things will for His sake, seem easy, and bitter things, sweet.

5. If the believer would advance in holy consolation, let him, in the faith of redeeming love to him, learn to *delight more and more, in the law* of the Lord. The more, he is enabled to delight in the *will* of God, expressed in that holy law; the more comfortable and happy is he, in doing that will<sup>a</sup>: the more pleasure, does he take, in performing every part of his duty: and seeing he is commanded to employ himself *always*, in present duty; the more, his present duty is his delight, the more, will he always be delighted. “Great peace,” saith the Psalmist, “have they who love thy law: and nothing shall offend them<sup>b</sup>.” For the more, they delight in the holiness, spirituality, and perfection of the law, as the rule of their duty, and in holy obedience to it; the clearer evidence they have, that they are so justified by faith, as to have peace with God; the more, do they enjoy peace of conscience, which is a *sense* of peace with God; and

<sup>a</sup> Ps. cxii. 1.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. cxix. 165.

the more, are they at peace with the creatures of God. No external troubles or offences, can deprive them of this "great peace," or divert them from the path of duty, in which they delight. Indeed the more, a holy man delights in the commandments of the law, as expressions, of the will of God the Father who loveth him; of the mind of Christ who redeemeth him, and of the desire of the Holy Spirit who dwelleth in him; the more, will he regard sincere obedience to them, as his privilege, his pleasure, and his comfort. Those precepts, which are all "holy, and just, and good," prescribe good and pleasant work to him; such work as is, not only good for him, but agreeable to the bent of his renewed nature. The more, therefore, he advances in sanctification, the more pleasure, doth he take in doing, and even in suffering, the will of his heavenly Father. So much, was this the attainment of the holy apostle Paul, that "he gloried in tribulations;" that "he took pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake;" because it was the *will* of God, that he should endure them, and because they afforded the *power* of Christ, an opportunity so to rest upon him, as to be gloriously displayed, and evidenced to be perfect, in his weakness<sup>c</sup>. Doubtless, his taking pleasure even in manifold sufferings, for the sake of Christ, could not but be attended with such a measure of holy consolation, as would make him "exceeding joyful, in all his tribulation<sup>d</sup>." Thus it is evident, that the more a believer delights in the

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.<sup>d</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 4.

providential, and especially in the preceptive, will of God, and the more spiritual and exact his obedience is; the more experience has he, of spiritual comfort. Besides, his delighting in, or savouring those things of the Spirit, is a comfortable evidence to him, not only, that he hath the Spirit of Christ, and that the prevailing inclination of his heart, is toward spiritual and holy objects; but, that the delight which he has in the Lord, and in the word and law of the Lord, is his *chief* delight<sup>e</sup>. O how cheering must it be to a holy man, to be conscious, not only that the grace of the promises, but that the holiness of the precepts, instead of displeasing him, renders them inexpressibly pleasant to his soul<sup>f</sup>! He cannot perish in his affliction, because the law of God is his delight<sup>g</sup>. Delight in the will of the Lord, is heaven upon earth, the very essence of real satisfaction, of true felicity. The Lord himself, is inconceivably happy in his own will; and he hath revealed it to his people, that they might be happy in it likewise.

6. Another mean of retaining and increasing spiritual comfort, is, frequently to exercise *godly sorrow, or contrition of heart, for sin*. To be contrite in heart is, from a principle of faith in Christ, of love to God, and of desire to please and honour him, to be sorrowful for having sinned against him. The apostle Paul styleth sorrow for sin, “*godly sorrow*<sup>h</sup>,” that is, sorrow which hath God in Christ, for its *author*, and its *object*; or sorrow for God, for having by sin, offended a God of infinite

<sup>e</sup> Ps. xliii. 4. and cxix. 127.

<sup>g</sup> Ps. cxix. 92.

<sup>f</sup> Ps. cxix. 143.

<sup>h</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 10.

holiness, justice, faithfulness, and goodness; or sorrow *according* to God, according to believing views of his redeeming mercy, and according to his holy will; or sorrow which is *acceptable* to God, through Jesus Christ. The same apostle informs us that, "it worketh repentance unto salvation," that evangelical repentance, which is a man's turning from all sin to God, as in Christ a God of infinite mercy and grace. Now in order to advance in holy consolation, the Christian must, in the faith of pardoning mercy, and of sanctifying grace, exercise frequently that godly sorrow for sin, especially for the sin that dwelleth in him. The exercise of godly sorrow, is not only consistent with holy joy; but it always tends to it, and frequently issues in it; yea, it even includes it. Such refreshing of soul, such joy of heart, is often experienced in the depth of godly sorrow; that the true penitent would not exchange, even the lowest degree of *that* joy, for all the carnal mirth in the world. The most sorrowful Christian would not, for a thousand worlds, exchange states, or pleasures, with the most prosperous of ungodly men. In comparison of that pure and solid joy, with which, the penitential sorrow of a true believer, is often attended, carnal mirth is folly, and even madness<sup>1</sup>. His mourning for sin, because it hath offended his gracious God, and wounded his compassionate Saviour; because it hath pierced that heart which loveth him, and shed that blood which saveth him; is a joyful mourning, a real comfort to his soul. To mourn for sin,

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. ii. 2.

on such accounts as these, is, as one expresses it, to weep for joy. As godly sorrow cannot be exercised by the Christian, without some comfortable apprehension of the mercy of God to him, or of Christ's having been pierced for *his* iniquities; so, it is seldom exercised by him, without some degree of comfort experienced, either in, or after, his exercise of it. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and *all* her paths are peace.<sup>k</sup>" The believing penitent takes delight, in mourning for his crucified Redeemer; in sitting down at his pierced feet, and bathing them with his tears. His godly sorrow is a mean, both of preparing him for consolation, and of introducing it into his soul. Accordingly, Jehovah promiseth that He will "dwell with him, who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones<sup>l</sup>." The Lord Jesus also saith, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted<sup>m</sup>:" and again, "The Lord hath anointed me,...to bind up the broken-hearted;...to comfort all that mourn<sup>n</sup>." Hence holy fasting is represented in Scripture, as spiritual feasting<sup>o</sup>. The penitential grief of a holy man, is also *matter* of joy to him. He rejoices more, to feel his heart melting for sin, than he would do, in enjoying all the carnal delights of the sons of men. He finds a secret sweetness in the tears of evangelical repentance; a balm which refreshes and cheers his soul. Besides, godly sorrow renders him *capable* of receiving in a higher degree, in-

<sup>k</sup> Prov. iii 17.<sup>l</sup> Isa. lvii. 15.<sup>m</sup> Matth. v. 4.<sup>n</sup> Isa. lxi. 1, 2.<sup>o</sup> Zech. viii. 19.

fluences of holy consolation. The more he grieves in a godly manner for sin, the more capable is he, of rejoicing in God his Saviour: yea, the more he grieves that he cannot as he ought, grieve for his iniquity, and mourns that he cannot mourn; the more capacity has he, for receiving and enjoying spiritual comfort. The joy of God's salvation is not to be found, but in the deep recesses of a contrite heart. Although, then, true repentance consists more, in turning from all sin to God, than merely in sorrow for sin; yet, in order to retain and increase his comfort, for the service and the glory of God, the believer should diligently exercise that sorrow.

7. It will be necessary for the same purpose, that he be *more and more diligent in mortifying the sin*, that dwelleth in him. When the Christian finds himself, yielding to motions of sin in his heart, it cannot but occasion to him, trouble of soul; but, when he feels himself, by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, enabled to resist or act against them, it is a special comfort to him: and the more he is enabled to maintain a holy opposition to them, the more pure and solid, is his consolation. To mortify the deeds of the body of sin, and the members of it which are upon the earth<sup>p</sup>, is,—constantly to apply the blood and the Spirit of Christ, for subduing, weakening, and destroying it, with all its corrupt affections, principles, and practices: it is, by the gracious influences of the Spirit of Christ, so to resist, and to subdue, the vital qualities, and active powers of

<sup>p</sup> Rom. viii. 13. Col. iii. 5.

the body of sin in the heart, as gradually to destroy them. Now, one of the means, which the believer must employ, in order to retain and increase his comfort, is, to maintain constantly, a holy opposition to all the affections, principles, and motions, of the body of sin in him; until, in conformity to Christ in his crucifixion, and by grace derived from his fulness, they be destroyed. The more resolute he is, and the more pleasure he takes, in thus mortifying them; the more of spiritual and pure consolation, will he attain. The more of sanctifying influences, he derives by faith, for the mortification of sin; the more of consoling influences, will he commonly receive. Accordingly, David prayed thus, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; renew in me a right spirit;" and then, "Restore to me the *joy* of thy salvation<sup>a</sup>." As the Christian advances, in mortifying his unbelief and pride, his self-righteous and worldly spirit; he will increase his enjoyment of the cheering light of his heavenly Father's countenance. The more diligent and successful he is, in mortifying his propensity to cavil or dispute, against the freeness of the offers, promises, and grace of the gospel; the more disposed he will be, to admit, and to relish, the comforts of the gospel. It is in proportion as remaining sin dies in the believer, that he lives a life of holiness, and of comfort. The weaker the body of sin in him, is, the less power over him, will his other spiritual enemies have: the temptations of Satan, and of the world, will proportionably lose their influence with him. The

<sup>a</sup> Ps. li. 10, 12.

only care of the hypocrite, is, to reform his *life*; whereas, the main, though not the only, concern of the sincere believer, is, to cleanse his *heart*<sup>r</sup>. And the sweetness, which he experiences, in obtaining victory over sin in his heart, is a thousand times greater, than the seeming pleasure, which is felt in gratifying sin. Indeed, were the least *real* pleasure to be enjoyed in sinning, the torments of the damned in hell, would thereby be greatly lessened; for there, they will for ever sin, in the utmost degree possible: but, instead of being the less, they shall be the more tormented *by*, as well as for, their sinning. Believer, take heed that thou be diligent, in mortifying the depravity of thy heart. The further thou advancest, in mortifying the sin that remains in thee, and especially the sin that more easily besets thee; the more pleasure wilt thou take, in mortifying it, and the more comfort wilt thou experience, in thy conflicts with it. Learn to hate all sin, in an increasing degree; for the more thou abhorrest it, the greater delight thou wilt take, in opposing, and subduing it. Holy joy can consist with remaining sin, but not with retained and indulged sin. Mortify then, through the Spirit, the corruption of thy nature; and Christ will not be constrained to mortify it for thee, by the extremity of outward, or of inward trouble. Study to attain more eminence in that grace, which is the direct opposite of the sin, which doth easily beset thee.

<sup>r</sup> Jer. iv. 14. Luther used to say, 'I fear more what is within me, than what comes from without: the storms and winds without, do never move the earth: it is only vapours within, that cause earthquakes.'



8. The Christian must, for the same end, endeavour daily, to become *more and more circumspect and conscientious*, in the practice of universal holiness. It is only, in proportion as he “walketh in the fear of the Lord,” that he can walk “in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.” To walk circumspectly is, to be habitually cautious and watchful, on every side, against all manner of sin; and to be always attentive to every duty, and to every circumstance of duty: or it is, to walk in all the duties of holiness, with wisdom, diligence, and exactness. So far as a good man walketh circumspectly, he is in all things, upright, exact, and conscientious. He is “in the fear of the Lord all the day long.” From a principle of faith in Christ, and of love to God, he dreads sin as the worst evil in the world; and consequently, he abstains even from all appearance of that evil<sup>1</sup>. He abstains from the very appearance of it, not merely, because he sees that it is reasonable and prudent to do so, but because it is the will of his God and Father. And though this doth not afford him, the smallest title to Divine consolation; yet he knows that it is a necessary mean of it, and that it is inseparably connected with as much of it, as the Lord seeth good to afford him. The more spiritually, and closely, he walks with God; the more, doth he walk in the light of his countenance. The more, he makes the practice of universal holiness, his main business, a business in which, he principally engages, and which, he pursues with the greatest earnestness and diligence; the clearer evi-

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 31.<sup>2</sup> Prov. xxiii. 17.<sup>3</sup> 1 Thess. v. 22.

dence has he, that the Holy Spirit the Comforter dwelleth in him. Accordingly, the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments: and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever \*." Let the believer then beware of sinning, especially, of sinning wilfully: for that would provoke the Lord, to cover his evidences with a cloud in his anger, and to suspend influences of consolation, from his soul. Let it be his constant purpose, and unwearied endeavour, through grace, to please God in every thing, and to displease Him in nothing. To walk circumspectly, is indeed the sure way to walk comfortably, and to advance in comfort. He who is enabled, from the principles of faith and love, and for the glory of God, so to walk, "shall sing in the righteous ways of the Lord †;" for he shall find that they "are ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace." As holy comfort, is necessary to the practice of holiness; so increasing holiness of heart and of life, is requisite to the maintenance and increase of comfort. As heat accompanies fire, so a greater or less measure of comfort, usually attends the spiritual performance of holy actions ‡. It cannot be otherwise. For to walk circumspectly in a course of holy obedience, is, to walk with God, the God of all comfort; to walk in Christ, the Consolation of Israel; and to walk after the Spirit, the Holy Comforter.

If the believer would walk so circumspectly, as to glorify Christ, and to promote his own comfort,

\* John xiv. 15, 16. † Ps. cxxxviii. 5. ‡ Ps. xix. 11.

he must, first, take heed that he do not on any occasion, walk in the *dark*, that he do not go forward, where he cannot, by the light of holy Scripture, discern his way; and, next, he should be as much afraid of taking comfort, merely from his duties themselves, as from his sins.

9. To grow in *spiritual mindedness*, is also the way to maintain and increase spiritual comfort. "To be spiritually minded" is, from the spiritual principles of grace, and under the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, to have the mind and heart, frequently, intently, and delightfully, employed about spiritual objects. It is, to have all the powers of the soul habitually concurring, in spiritual thoughts and desires, and in taking a holy complacency in the things of the Spirit, especially in the things concerning Christ, and the wonderful scheme of redemption by him. Now, one special mean of advancing in spiritual consolation, is, to increase in spiritual mindedness. The apostle Paul informs us that, "to be spiritually minded is life and peace<sup>2</sup>." It is in its very nature, *spiritual life*, and is the earnest and the beginning of life eternal, consisting in the full and immediate fruition of God and the Lamb, in the mansions of glory: and, in proportion as the believer increases in it, his soul is endued, not only with spiritual activity, but with pleasing serenity, and pure consolation. The more spiritually minded, he becomes, the more of spiritual *peace* and comfort, he attains. The more, he spiritually understands, meditates, relishes, and delights in, the doctrine of redeeming grace, and the glory of God, displayed in the won-

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 6.

derful person and work of the great Redeemer ; the more of pleasing tranquillity, and of refreshing delight, does he experience. By how much, he grows in spiritual understanding, or, in the knowledge of the transcendent loveliness and love of God in Christ, and of the excellence, suitableness, and freeness, of salvation by Christ ; by so much, does he experience holy serenity, and solid consolation, in committing to such a God, and such a Saviour, all his spiritual and temporal concerns. In proportion as his heart becomes more deeply sensible, of the unparalleled holiness and beauty of spiritual objects, and of his own personal interest in them ; it is delighted, enlarged, and elevated. Whether he contemplates the cheering truths, and precious promises of the gospel, or practises the spiritual duties of the law, toward his God or his neighbour ; the more spiritual he is, in them, the more pure, solid, and heavenly, is the pleasure which he enjoys. These are the banquet of his mind. They are sweeter than honey to his taste. In proportion as his spiritual understanding, and his disposition to count all earthly things, empty and mean, in comparison of union with Christ and of conformity to Him, increase ; he sets his affection on things above, he places his happiness in them, and rejoices in hope of them. When he advances in habitual desires, and in holy endeavours, to aim, in all his exercise of graces, and performance of duties, at the glory of his God and Redeemer ; he, in the same proportion, glories and delights in the Lord. To become more and more spiritually minded, then, is a sure way of attaining higher degrees of spiritual comfort. As the higher

a bird flies, the more out of danger he is, from the snares of the fowler ; so the higher a believer soars, in spirituality of mind, above the world, the higher, and the safer, is his consolation.

Moreover, the Christian, in order to attain increasing comfort, must be always on his guard against *formality and remissness*, in his exercise of graces, and performance of duties. To be remiss or formal, in performing any of his duties, is the very opposite of being spiritually minded. Now he may assure himself, that he is declining into formality,—if he be more studious of approving himself to men, than to God ; if, instead of performing his duties, with holy delight, he perform them as a task ; if, instead of habitually exercising faith, love, godly sorrow, and spiritual desire, in performing them, he satisfy himself with the external performance ; and, if the remaining carnality of his mind, be not so grievous or burdensome to him, as formerly. Nothing will more effectually hinder, his advancing in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, than remissness or negligence of spirit, in the duties of religion<sup>a</sup>. For, when the Christian does not serve God with his spirit, he grieves the Holy Spirit of God, and provokes Him to suspend influences of consolation, from his soul ; and when he does not ardently pursue increasing communion with Christ, in holy exercises, he cannot expect, to enjoy the *comfort* of communion with him.

10. Another mean of a believer's advancing in spiritual comfort, is, to become *more and more con-*

<sup>a</sup> Song v. 2 6. Prov. x. 4.

*lent with God in Christ*, as his inheritance. He cannot be comfortable, but in proportion as he is content. God in Christ, as their Covenant-God, is the sure, the boundless, the unchanging, and the everlasting, portion of all the saints. Nothing can be added to Him: nothing can be taken from him, or diminished in him. A holy man may lose all his earthly possessions, but he cannot lose his God, nor any thing in God; and therefore he continues still as rich, as he was before. His outward comforts, are only *lent* him, in order to be used for a season, and then, to be willingly and thankfully restored; but his God, is *given* him, to be eternally enjoyed by him, as his immense, unchangeable, and sure portion: and therefore he has as much reason, to be satisfied with, and to rejoice in, his all-sufficient inheritance, after, as before, his outward losses. The ancient Church, accordingly, after she had been deprived of her best external comforts, placed her happiness and her hope in Jehovah, as her sure portion: "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him<sup>b</sup>." And Asaph, when he was emerging from his depths of spiritual trouble, said to Jehovah, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth, that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever<sup>c</sup>." The sincere believer, trusting that a gracious God bestoweth Himself, and all that he is, and that he hath, upon him, as his infinite inheritance; should be much more content than he is, with his por-

<sup>b</sup> Lam. iii. 24.<sup>c</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26.

tion. The more satisfied he is with God in Christ, as his inheritance, the more pleasure will he take in him; and the more pleasure he taketh in him, the more consolation will he receive from him, and the more will he rejoice in him. “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom,” saith Habakkuk, “neither shall fruit be in the vines;...yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation<sup>d</sup>.” In proportion as the believer is content with God, or satisfied that his Covenant-God is enough for him, without any thing else, except what infinite wisdom and love see meet, for a time, to afford him; he attains true, lasting, and increasing enjoyment. If he have outward comforts, he enjoys God in them; or if he have been deprived of them, he still enjoys them in God: so that, his spiritual enjoyment or comfort is not, strictly speaking, dependent on them. Being satisfied with God himself, as his portion, he learns to be content with all the providential dispensations of God. “I have learned,” says Paul, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content<sup>e</sup>,” &c. The Lord Jesus hath given to his Church, “exceeding great and precious promises;” in order that every saint may, by faith, “suck, and be satisfied with, these breasts of her consolation<sup>f</sup> :” and God, having reconciled them to himself in him, hath graciously promised that, *He will be their God*. O what cause, then, hath the believer, to be always content! “He is an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ;” and therefore—*all*

<sup>d</sup> Hab. iii. 17, 18.

<sup>e</sup> Philip. iv. 11, 12.

<sup>f</sup> Isa. lxvi. 11.

*things are his*<sup>g</sup>. There is more ground of comfort in this, than the heart of man can conceive. God in Christ, is thy inheritance, believer; and therefore whatever He is, or hath, or doth, or can do; —all shall promote thy consolation in time, and thy felicity through eternity. Be contented, then, as well thou mayest, with thy glorious, thy boundless, thy incorruptible, thy unfading, inheritance<sup>h</sup>. Live continually and comfortably upon thy God. Make up all thy happiness in Him. Blame thyself, if thou wantest strong consolation, when the God of all comfort, is thy God and thy portion: for thou art never without comfort, but when, thou art not satisfied with something in thy God and Redeemer. See that thou rejoice more in Him, than in all the delights of the sons of men. Knowest thou any thing desirable, or delightful, in the creature? Thou mayest find it in thy Redeemer, and enjoy it in thy God. What although thou have lost, not merely one, but *all* thy earthly comforts; in possessing God, the fountain of living waters, thou still possessest *all* things: thou hast one comfort still, which is worth infinitely more than *all* others.—“This God is *thy* God for ever and ever: He will be thy guide even unto death<sup>i</sup>.” See the hand of thy God, in that which is, and be not disquieted by it: see that which is to come, in His hand, and be not discouraged in the prospect

<sup>g</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 21.

<sup>h</sup> Menedemus being told, one day, that it was a great felicity to have whatever we desire, ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘but it is a much greater, to desire nothing but what we have.’ BUCK’S Anecdotes, vol. i. p. 111.

<sup>i</sup> Ps. xlviii. 14.



of it. What canst thou wish for, in an inheritance, that is not in thy Covenant-God? If thou wouldst have a *large* estate, He is infinite: if thou wouldst have *sure* possession, He is unchangeable: if thou wouldst desire *durable* riches, He is eternal. If God were to give thee, all that is in the universe, without himself; thou shouldst be completely miserable, and couldst never be satisfied. None can afford satisfaction to thy soul, but that dear Saviour who gave, and that gracious God who received, satisfaction for the sin of the soul.

11. If the believer would advance in spiritual consolation, he must also increase daily, *in holy resignation to the will* of the Lord. He must endeavour, by grace, not only to be content with God in Christ, as his infinite portion; but to increase in holy resignation of heart, to the will of God, with respect to all his earthly comforts. The way to advance in peaceful tranquillity of soul, is, to become so resigned to the providential will of the Lord, as always to submit without murmuring, to that holy will. God's will of providence, as well as his will of precept, is not only wise, and sovereign, but holy, and just, and good. It is infinitely wise, and therefore it cannot be liable to the smallest mistake, in its determination of any thing, respecting the external condition of the believer. It is absolutely *sovereign*, and therefore it is in vain for him, to attempt resistance to it. It is also infinitely *holy and righteous*; and for these reasons, it is infinitely incapable of doing a Christian, the smallest injury, or of dispensing to him any thing, whether pleasant or painful, but what is right, and even necessary for him. It is infinitely *good* like-

wise ; and therefore it can appoint nothing to happen in the outward condition of a believer but what is good, yea, *best*, for subserving at the time, the sanctification and consolation of his soul. So good, is the will of the Lord, that it hath determined, never to give, nor to take away, a single outward comfort from a saint, but when this is good for him, or even necessary, to promote the great designs of redeeming grace, in his salvation. So wise and good, is that adorable will, that all things do, under the direction and control of it, “ work together for good, to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose <sup>k</sup>.” If therefore, a holy man would advance in pure consolation, he must study, in dependance on the grace of Christ, cordially to resign himself, and all his concerns, to the holy will, of his heavenly Father. The more, he studies to *delight* in the holy will of God, the more, will he be disposed to acquiesce in it ; and the more he acquiesces in it, the more of comfort, amidst all the vicissitudes of life, shall he experience. Let him endeavour to love it, in an increasing degree : for, in proportion as he loves it, he will be pleased with it, and will rejoice to think that, every thing in his lot has been, from eternity, unalterably fixed according to it. He will delight in the cheering thought that, under the direction and control of it, all objects, all events, do either directly or indirectly, promote his eternal welfare ; and that, all hands in the universe, are *continually at work*, for good to him. If affliction come, the storm, which

<sup>k</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

then arises in his natural passions, is hushed into a calm ; and not only doth submission, but sweet resignation, ensue.

So far as the believer attains holy resignation, he is *secure from disappointment* ; for his leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done concerning him, cannot fail to be accomplished. He believes that, the Lord chooseth better for him, than he can do, for himself. He is persuaded, not only that he hath no *right*, to complain of any providential dispensation, but that he hath no *reason*, because “ all the paths of the Lord, are mercy and truth to him <sup>1</sup>.” “ I was dumb,” says holy David, “ I opened not my mouth, because *thou* didst it <sup>m</sup>.” In proportion as he is resigned to the holy will of God, he is always pleased, always comfortable ; because whatever pleaseth God, pleases him. As far as his will is in union with the will of the Lord, he shall always have what he chooses : he shall constantly be in a state of enjoyment, as having the very thing which he desires. If he be under affliction, he comforts himself with thinking that, it is the appointment of his heavenly Father’s will. Believer, the more thou welcomest the *whole will* of thy gracious God and Father, the more happiness and comfort, shalt thou enjoy. Consider, how unbecoming, how sinful it is, to murmur against the will of the only-wise God thy Saviour. Know that, the moment thou repinest at the providence of the Lord, thou secretly accusest him : thou presumest to charge Him, with having done thee an injury ; to blame him for something wrong, in his

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxv. 10.

<sup>m</sup> Ps. xxxix. 9.

management of thy affairs. But is not this the same as secretly to blaspheme him? O, if thou wouldst maintain spiritual consolation, take heed that, thou murmur not against the holy will of thy gracious God. Thou art not qualified, to be the chooser of thy own outward condition; and therefore it belongeth not to thy wisdom and will, but to His, to dispose of all thy affairs.

12. Another mean of advancing in holy consolation, is, to become *more and more thankful for blessings*, either received; or promised. “To give thanks always for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ <sup>n</sup>,” is both the duty, and the privilege, of a holy man. It is his *duty*, in every condition of life, to maintain a thankful frame of heart, and to express daily to the Lord, a lively and grateful sense of the unmerited, and unnumbered benefits, which He hath bestowed upon him. The apostle Paul, accordingly, gave this charge to the Thessalonians; “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, concerning you <sup>o</sup>.” And, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, he says, “By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name <sup>p</sup>.” It is also a *privilege* to the believer, when he is enabled in every circumstance of life, to be thankful for the mercies, which God bestoweth either upon himself or others. A disposition to be, in every condition, thankful to the Lord, for benefits received from him, is always attended with some degree of comfort, in a

<sup>n</sup> Ep<sup>l</sup>. v. 20.    <sup>o</sup> 1 Thess. v. 18.    <sup>p</sup> Heb. xiii. 15.

holy soul. A saint's frequent recollection, and acknowledgment, of the sweet mercies which he has in hand, and of the sure mercies which he has in hope, tend to sweeten and to cheer his spirit. Praise and thanksgiving, according to the following passages of Scripture, are the genuine expressions of a comfortable frame of soul: "My heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise him<sup>q</sup>." "Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee." "My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips<sup>r</sup>." "My lips shall greatly rejoice, when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed<sup>s</sup>." While these passages evince praise and thanksgiving, to be the native expressions of holy joy; they at the same time, intimate that a saint's being disposed, gratefully to praise and thank the Lord, for blessings, either received or promised, is commonly attended with an increase of comfort or joy. An habitual cheerfulness of spirit, is thereby maintained and increased. A heart truly thankful is, in the same proportion, cheerful. The most humble and thankful of the saints, are commonly the most eminent in holiness and comfort. Indeed, thankfulness and comfort imply each other. A holy man must be in some degree, comfortable, in order to be thankful; and thankful, in order to be in an increasing degree, comfortable. If, then, he would retain and increase his holy consolation, let him frequently give thanks to God, not only for the unspeakable gift of his dear Son; but, for all his benefits conferred upon him: let him, as often and

<sup>q</sup> Ps. xxviii. 7.    <sup>r</sup> Ps. lxiii. 3, 5.    <sup>s</sup> Ps. lxxi. 23.

as much as possible, gratefully remember them, and thank the Lord for each of them ; whether it be a great or a small, a spiritual or a temporal, blessing. He must be thankful particularly, for the degree of comfort with which, the Lord hath already favoured him ; and then, if his trials or sufferings do at any time abound, “ his consolation by Christ will also abound.” Let him extract arguments, even from the darkest dispensations of providence, for exciting him to be *always* thankful to his God and Redeemer : for, when he is continually thankful, he will in the same proportion, be comfortable. He should, moreover, express his gratitude daily, for the inestimable and innumerable blessings, vouchsafed to him ; by giving to God in Christ, all the glory of them, and by employing them all, for the purposes of his glory : so shall he enjoy them, and experience increasing comfort in using them.

13. Further, Let the believer *pray* with increasing importunity, *for the continuance and increase* of his holy comfort. The fervent and incessant prayer of faith, is a mean, not only of recovering, but of retaining, and increasing, spiritual consolation. Let him therefore pray importunately, not only for sanctifying, but for *consoling* influences. The Spirit is the Comforter of the saints ; and God “ giveth the Holy Spirit, to them who ask him.” The Christian, then, should with increasing earnestness, pray to his heavenly Father, in the name of Christ, and in the faith of the promise, for the refreshing and comforting grace of the blessed

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xi. 13.

Spirit. The more earnestly and frequently, he offers up the prayer of faith, for grace and consolation; the more will his heart be strengthened, with the consolation of the Holy Comforter. "In the day when I cried," saith David, "thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."<sup>v</sup> When the God of consolation, seemeth at any time, to be forgetting, or passing by the exercised believer; the prayer of faith will call him in. When the Lord Jesus, having come to Emmaus, made as though he would have gone further, and when the two disciples constrained him, saying, "Abide with us; for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent; He went in to tarry with them."<sup>x</sup> The less, true Christians desire from Christ, the less, do they glorify the immense riches of his grace; but, on the contrary, the more they expect, and the more they ask from him, the more will he give, and the more will he manifest his delight, in giving to them. The believer therefore should pray, as the apostle Paul did for the saints at Rome, "That the God of hope, would fill him with all joy and peace in believing";<sup>y</sup> and, as the same apostle prayed for the Thessalonians, "That the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even his Father, would comfort his heart, and establish him in every good word and work."<sup>z</sup> And he should pray as the disciples did, That the Lord would increase his faith; for as faith is increased, so is the joy of faith. Let him

<sup>v</sup> Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

<sup>y</sup> Rom. xv. 13.

<sup>x</sup> Luke xxiv. 28, 29.

<sup>z</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

pray that he may be enabled, always to thirst for spiritual consolation, “as the hart thirsteth for the water-brooks;” and, at the same time, let his desire of sensible comfort, be regulated by a due submission to the sovereign will of God. Paul had not been long praying, before it was revealed to him, that he was a chosen vessel. It was, when Jesus Christ himself was praying, that He was transfigured, and that “a voice from the excellent glory, said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Those of the saints who pray most, have the most comfort. Prayer crowneth God, with the glory of his redeeming grace; and God crowneth prayer, with the comfort of that grace.

If a holy man would so pray, as thereby to advance in spiritual comfort, he must not only pray in faith, and with importunity; but he must pray with his spirit, with understanding, with sincere desire of that which he asketh, with watchfulness, attention, and ardour. He should make supplication to God, as his God and Father, in the name of Christ, by the help of the Spirit, and *only* for things which are promised. “He ought always to pray, and not to faint<sup>a</sup> ;” or, “to continue instant in prayer<sup>b</sup>.” It will be necessary also, that he *plead* in prayer; that he plead the promises, and that he fill his mouth with such arguments, as will tend to excite and increase his faith, and hope, and love. He must, moreover, be habitually disposed to pray, to intermingle ejaculatory prayer with all his other duties, and to pray much in secret. It was when Jacob retired for secret prayer, that the Angel of

<sup>a</sup> Luke xviii. 1.<sup>b</sup> Rom. xii. 12.



the covenant came to him, and enabled him so to wrestle with Him by supplication, as to receive the blessing. She, who was alone with Jesus at the sepulchre, was the first, who participated in the joy of his resurrection. The holy Psalmist, seems to have considered the comfort, which he enjoyed with God in *secret*, as his sweetest comfort <sup>c</sup>.

14. It is necessary for the same purpose, that the believer increase daily, in his *knowledge of the grounds* of spiritual consolation. He must, in order to advance in true comfort, study through grace, to attain clearer and juster views of God the Father, as a God of love, grace, and mercy to him; of Christ, in his person, righteousness, fullness, offices, and relations; of the Holy Spirit, as his quickener, sanctifier, Comforter, and guide; of the covenant of grace, in the admirable suitability, fulness, and stability of it; and of the doctrines, offers, and promises of the glorious gospel. The more spiritual and enlarged, clear and distinct, his knowledge, especially, of these grounds of pure consolation, is; the more, will he see reason to be of good comfort; the more, will the principle and habit of spiritual joy, increase in his soul; and the more, will he rejoice in Christ Jesus, and glory in his cross. A spiritual and clear understanding of those glorious, and reviving objects, will make his way clear, in *taking* comfort. Remaining ignorance, in the mind of a good man, is, for the most part, the parent of all his doubts and perplexities of spirit; because he does not know, how far he may, or may not, take encour-

<sup>c</sup> Ps. lxi. 5, 6.

agement and comfort. Were he but to study the covenant of grace more, and to understand better, wherein it differs from the covenant of works; his doubts and fears would proportionably *evanish*, as clouds before the sun shining in its strength; and he would attain more of the holiness, and of the consolation, which are therein promised him. The better he understands that well-ordered and sure covenant, and the more he meditates on it, and admires it; the more cordials, he will find in it, to cheer him, under all his pressures and faintings of soul. If he understood better, that eternal, and wonderful contract, he would look for less from the creature, and for more from the Redeemer, for less here, and for more hereafter. He would discern more clearly, that a humbling *sense*, of the sinfulness and strength of sin in his heart, is a good evidence of spiritual life in it; and that he has, notwithstanding the sin that remaineth in him, much, in the promises, daily to afford him pure consolation. It is "through the *knowledge of God*," as his Covenant-God, "and of Jesus our Lord," as his Covenant-head, that "grace and *peace* are multiplied" to the believer<sup>d</sup>. Let him then "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ<sup>e</sup>," that sure foundation of holy comfort; "and the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, shall keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus<sup>f</sup>." If the pleasure even of natural knowledge, is great; how inexpressibly great, must the pleasure of advancing in spiritual knowledge, be!

<sup>d</sup> 2 Pet. i. 2.      <sup>e</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 18.      <sup>f</sup> Philip. iv. 7.

15. If the believer would attain an increase of spiritual, and solid consolation, let him *not give ear to the reports of sense*. By sense here, is meant, the present frame; or feeling, or perception, of an exercised Christian; which is either pleasant, or unpleasant, and is continually subject to change. To hearken and trust to the reports of sense, or in other words, to make his feelings or frames, the ground of his faith, or the rule according to which, he regulates his exercise; renders the faith of the Christian, unsteady, and hinders the growth of it: and if the growth of faith, be obstructed, the increase of spiritual comfort, will be obstructed likewise. Sense judges and reports, that he is in a state of grace, and that Christ saveth him, merely, because his feelings are pleasant and comfortable. It concludes that his state is either good or bad, only from what he *feels*, or from his present frame of spirit. If this be lively and pleasant, sense reports that he is in a state of grace, and that Christ is acting the part of a Saviour to him. If, on the contrary, his frame be dull and unpleasant, sense reports that he is not in a state of grace, and that it would be rash and presumptuous in him, to trust that Jesus will save him. Thus the report, which it makes to the believer's conscience, of the state of his soul before God, and of his salvation by Jesus Christ, is not founded on unchangeable grounds, which would set his mind and conscience at rest; but, on things which are *changeable*, and which frequently expose him to perplexing doubts and fears. If, instead of making the record of God, he make his lively feelings, the foundation of his faith; his acting of faith, will

be either lively or languid, either more or less, just as these are. If, instead of trusting in Christ, upon the warrant of the offers and calls of the gospel, which is an unchanging, as well as an authentic, warrant, he trust in Christ, upon the ground of his own pleasant feelings, which are perpetually changing; his exercise of faith must cease, as often as his lively or comfortable frame ceases. Now, how can his faith increase, if it be not *daily* exercised? and how can he exercise it daily, if he think that he ought not to exercise it, but upon the ground of a pleasant frame, which he may have to-day, and want to-morrow; yea, which he may not for a long season, enjoy? If, then, he would by daily actings of faith, derive solid and increasing consolation from the fulness of Christ; he must no longer ground his actings of faith, upon his feelings, but, upon the immutable offers and promises of God who cannot lie. By building his confidence in Christ, upon the reports of sense, he builds it upon a *wrong*, as well as a changeable, foundation; and thereby he forfeits his comfort, instead of deriving an increase of it. Faith cannot derive any increase, either of holiness or comfort, from Christ, except the exercise of it proceed upon its proper ground. It is not the report of sense, but the record of God, that is the true, and the warrantable, ground of saving faith. If the believer, then, would attain solid and increasing consolation, he must allow his faith to stand always, upon the record of God concerning his Son; for that is the *only right ground* of confidence in the Son of God, for salvation, and is therefore styled the word of faith. Then will he see that,

he has ground still to hold fast his confidence in his faithful Redeemer, when his pleasant frames are gone. Then will he learn, to retain the confidence of his heart, in his Divine Saviour, even when the reports of sense, contradict the report of the gospel; and, like Abraham, "against hope, to believe in hope." And in proportion, as he ceases to ground his confidence in the Lord Jesus, for salvation, upon his comfortable feelings; he will receive that pure and everlasting consolation from Christ, which will be the pleasant fruit, though not the ground, of his faith.

¶ In order to illustrate, as well as to confirm, what has been advanced in this particular, I cannot forbear transcribing the most part of a Paragraph from ROMANE's *Life of Faith*, p. 61.—'Sense judges from what it sees, and draws its inferences from what it feels: so that its report to the conscience, either of a believer's state, or of his growth in it, is not from unchangeable things, which would settle the conscience in peace, but from changeable things, which leave room for continual doubting. Sense also looks at the fruits of faith, more than at the object of it; and if the believer has been misled, and taught to confound these two together, he will be at great uncertainty in judging of his state: for instead of making the word of God, he will make his comforts, the ground of his faith; and as these are more or less, so will his faith be. When he has comfortable feelings, then he will think himself a believer; and when he has none, then he will think himself an unbeliever, changing his judgment of himself, as his feelings do, like the wind, and varying as his comforts do, like the weather. This is a common case. I have seen the sad effects of it, in the lives of many of my acquaintance, who, from being taught thus to judge of themselves, were tost about for several years, up and down, now comforted, then doubting, and could not get any solid establishment; till the word and Spirit of God

16. It will be necessary also, for the same purpose, that the believer be always upon his guard against *affected sadness*. Has he already, some happy measure of true consolation? Let him shew that he has it, by an habitual cheerfulness of temper, and of manner. Let him not, by assuming an air of gloominess, or peevishness, shew to any around him, that he finds no comfort, in a life of communion with the blessed Redeemer. When a believer is not afflicted with trouble of soul, and yet appears habitually dejected and gloomy; he thereby, in the view of others, gives the lie to the truth of his holy profession, as well as to the truth of God, in his promises of consolation.

convinced them, that sense was not to be the ground of their believing, nor the object to which they were to look. Sense judges by feeling, and reports what it sees. Sense says, Now I am in the favour of God; for I feel it. Now he is my God; for I find him so: I am comforted. Now he demonstrates it to me; for I feel nearness to him in prayer, and sweet answers. Now I am sure, my duties and services are acceptable; for I am quite lively in them, and come from them, with warm affections. Now I cannot doubt; for I feel the assurance of his love to me. And when sense has lost those comfortable feelings, then it draws contrary inferences—Now I am not in the favour of God; for I do not feel it. Now he is not my God; for I do not find him so: I am not comforted, &c. What can be the issue of this, but continual wavering and changing? For our feelings are sometimes more, sometimes less, as every believer experiences. What a state then must he be in, who has no way to judge of himself, but by those changeable things! What room does he leave for continual doubting, and what trouble and misery, does he thereby bring upon himself, as well as dishonour, to the unchangeableness of God in his nature and promises!

He thereby, practically declares it to be false, that God "is the God of all comfort," that the Lord Jesus "is the Consolation of Israel," that the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness." By assuming an air of gloominess, or of peevishness, he, instead of recommending the way of holiness, brings reproach upon that good way. Like the unbelieving spies, who, by bringing up an evil report of the promised land, discouraged the Israelites; he represents the life of faith and holiness, as an uncomfortable, an unamiable life, and so discourages, more effectually than one can express, sinners around him from trying to enter upon that life. Were he, on the contrary, by an habitual cheerfulness of temper and manner, to exhibit the comforts of religion, so far as he possesses them; he would resemble the faithful spies, who brought with them, clusters of the grapes of Canaan, that they might thereby, invite their brethren to enter that good land. It is his duty, as he is infinitely obliged to the Lord Jesus, to promote always the honour of his glorious name, and the interests of his spiritual kingdom, among men. His whole behaviour therefore should be such, as would be the means of winning souls to the blessed Redeemer. The apostle Peter, exhorteth wives to be in subjection to their own husbands; "that if any obey not the word, they also may, without the word, be won by the conversation of the wives <sup>h</sup>." A holy man should not only be, but appear to be, habitually cheerful; that all who know him, might have an opportunity of perceiving, that

<sup>h</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 1.

his blessed Saviour hath made him happy, as well as holy ; and that his holy religion, instead of having rendered him gloomy, hath disposed him to be cheerful. Conscious, that he is under the greatest obligations, to invite others around him, to “ taste and see that the Lord is good,” let him, henceforth, adopt this resolution of the holy Psalmist : “ My soul shall make her boast in the Lord : the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad<sup>1</sup>.” He has cause, indeed, to be always humble and penitent ; but no cause, to appear gloomy. A smiling aspect is comely ; and, doubtless, none have so good reason to be of a cheerful countenance, as the upright in heart. If the believer, then, would have lasting and increasing comfort, let him be continually upon his guard, against *affected* or pretended sadness ; else he will provoke the Lord, to deprive him of his present degree of comfort, and to afflict him with *real* sadness. Although he does not always enjoy sensible consolation ; yet he has the root and the habit of it, and has always good *cause* to rejoice. Let him therefore be always cheerful, and on every occasion shew, that he can distinguish between gravity and sullenness, seriousness and gloominess : and let him never appear so ignorant, as once to insinuate it to be right or becoming, in any true Christian, to appear habitually sad and sullen.

17. If the believer would attain increasing tranquillity of mind, he must *frequently examine his heart and conduct* ; in order that he may the more clearly discern his evidences of personal interest in spiritual consolation. The more clearly, he per-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 2.



ceives his personal interest in Christ, and in the covenant of grace; the higher, will the degree of his holy comfort usually be. The more diligently, he scrutinizes his heart and life, comparing them with the word of God; and the more frequently and clearly, he perceives, in consequence of the witnessing of the Holy Spirit, his evidences of union and communion with Christ; the more, will his heart be comforted and encouraged; the more, will he know that he is of the truth, and, with the greater confidence, will he assure his heart before God<sup>k</sup>. Now, when he has it in view at any time, to examine himself, let him begin it, by renewing his act of trusting in Christ, for all his salvation, as well as, for the joy of that salvation. For, if he begin this inquiry, by doubting that the Lord Jesus will not save him, or by yielding to distrust and despondency; he will be afraid to search deeply into his heart, or to know the worst of himself. But if he begin it, by an act of humble and direct confidence in Christ Jesus, for salvation to himself in particular; he will be disposed, as well as encouraged, to deal impartially with himself: he will be willing to find out the worst, as well as the best, of himself. He will not be afraid to find that his heart, so far as it is unrenewed, is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Besides, by means of that acting of faith, his other graces will be invigorated, and excited to lively exercise; and the more he exercises them, the more *easily*, and the more *clearly*, will he perceive them. Further, let him begin it also, by praying that, the Holy

<sup>k</sup> 1 John iii. 19, 21.

Spirit may shine upon the graces which, he trusts, are implanted in his heart; and so, “bear witness with his own spirit, that he is a child of God<sup>1</sup>.” He may then proceed to try his *graces*: and he should try them by their *nature*, rather than by the degree of their strength, or liveliness. Let him more especially examine himself, “whether he be in the *faith*, and so prove himself<sup>m</sup>.” If he do not discern true faith in his heart; yet, if he is conscious of an earnest desire, to believe cordially in Jesus Christ, accompanied by frequent endeavours to do so; he ought to conclude that, he hath some measure of that precious faith. An earnest and habitual desire of grace, is grace, in the account of God<sup>n</sup>: and a man’s desire of faith, of love, of hope, and of all the other graces of the Spirit, is sincere and earnest; when he desires them, for their own intrinsic excellence and amiableness, and chiefly, for the glory of God in Christ; and when, though he do not perceive them, he yet feels his need of them, and is conscious that he desires them, and desires even the perfection of them. Let the believer, then, trusting that the Lord Jesus giveth him grace, and that the holy Comforter will, in every time of need, shine upon that grace in his soul, and render it apparent to him; enter frequently, upon the trial of his state and conduct: and if he find but one scriptural evidence of his being in a state of grace, he ought for his comfort to conclude, that, he has all the other evidences of being in it, though he cannot at present, clearly perceive them. Nevertheless, he

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 16.<sup>m</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 5.<sup>n</sup> Matth. v. 6.

should frequently pursue the important inquiry, till he have the comfort of discerning clearly, *all* his evidences: for the more knowledge he has, of his personal interest in the blessings of salvation, the more consolation, he will enjoy.

Moreover, let the believer search daily into his heart and life, in order to find out more of his *sins*, and of his *wants*; that, by a deep and affecting sense of them, he may be urged to apply and plead frequently, the promises of pardon and of sanctification. This is a necessary mean of “walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.”

18. Finally, In order to advance in spiritual consolation, the believer must endeavour diligently, *to mortify his fear of death*. Although death is, by the almighty Redeemer, so disarmed of its sting and strength, that it can do no hurt to any of his redeemed; yet it is still a dreadful enemy to nature. When the exercised Christian thinks of temporal death, as armed with the tremendous curse of the violated law, and as a punishment of sin; it assumes even to him, the grim and ghastly visage of “the king of terrors.” But when he contemplates it, as removed from the *curse* of the covenant of works, to the *promise* of the covenant of grace; as no longer a curse, but a blessing; and as no more an enemy, but a friend, to all the spiritual seed of Christ; its terror should not make him afraid. The apostle Paul said to the believers at Corinth, “Death is *your’s* °.” And concerning himself, he saith, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain p.” John the beloved disciple, “heard a voice

° 1 Cor. iii. 22.

p Philip. i. 21.

from heaven, saying unto him, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord<sup>a</sup>." If temporal death, then, is an article in the inventory of the believer's treasure, and if as such, it is *his in promise*; if it is *gain* to him, and a *blessing* in disguise; why should he any longer, fear it with a slavish dread? why should he suffer himself so to fear it, as, for a single moment, to lose the smallest degree of his holy consolation? If a good man therefore would subdue, and rise superior to, his fear of death, let him, under the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, study, 1st, To fear sin more and more. As one wedge drives out another, so the godly fear of sinning, expels the slavish fear of dying. 2d, Let him also in the prospect of dying, commit frequently his soul with all the concerns of it, to his infinitely merciful and faithful Redeemer; and let him commit it, with unsuspecting confidence, to Him; trusting firmly that, as he is able, so he is willing, "to keep that which he hath committed to him, against the great day." Let him constantly intrust to the Lord Jesus, the safety, the comfort, and the complete salvation, of his precious soul; and, as often as disquieting fear arises, let him say with the holy Psalmist, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee<sup>r</sup>." "None who trust in Him shall be desolate<sup>s</sup>." Seeing the great Redeemer, "who liveth for evermore, and who hath the keys of hell and of death," inviteth, and even commandeth the saints, to trust him with their souls, their bodies, and all their concerns; they may rest assured, that he will not deceive

<sup>a</sup> Rev. xiv. 13.<sup>r</sup> Ps. lvi. 3.<sup>s</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 22.

their expectation : no ; he will not deceive it ; for he hath promised that, he “ will never leave them, nor forsake them ”.<sup>c</sup> 3d, The Believer should, for the same purpose, familiarize to his mind, the thoughts of dying, and of his Redeemer’s glorious victory over death and the grave. He ought to meditate frequently on Christ’s having, as his federal representative, *disarmed* death to the dying Christian. The almighty Redeemer, hath disarmed it of its sting and strength, and so, of all its terror. “ The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law ”.<sup>d</sup> Now the Lord Jesus “ hath put away *sin*, by the sacrifice of himself ;” and he hath perfectly fulfilled the *law*, by his obedience unto death. Thus he hath, for the true believer, disarmed death of its venomous sting, and at the same time, of its strength or dreadful dominion. And what hurt, can the most poisonous and frightful monster do to him, when it has entirely lost, both its sting and its strength ? The Redeemer promiseth that, by taking away the sting, and the strength of it, he will be the *plague* of death, to his *dying* saints. Nay, he promiseth that, by raising them up in glory at the last day, he will be the *destruction* of death, to his *dead* saints. “ I will ransom them,” saith he “ from the power of the grave ; I will redeem them from death : O death, I will be thy plagues ; O grave, I will be thy destruction : repentance shall be hid from mine eyes ”.<sup>e</sup> Accordingly, we read that he “ hath abolished death ”<sup>f</sup> ; that is, he hath annulled, or re-

<sup>c</sup> Heb. xiii. 5.    <sup>d</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 56.    <sup>e</sup> Hos. xiii. 14.

<sup>f</sup> 2 Tim. i. 10.

duced it to nothing, or so destroyed it to all who believe in him, as to have turned it from a curse to a blessing. How consoling then, how cheering is the thought, that death disarmed, can do no more harm to the dying believer, than if it had been completely annulled ! It can, indeed, separate his soul from his body ; but it cannot separate, either the one or the other, from Him who is the living Redeemer, the resurrection and the life. The dying of a saint is but a sleeping : it is a sleeping IN JESUS<sup>1</sup>. Death to him, is but “ the shadow of death ;” it is not the substance. It is not the Omega, but the Alpha, of his consummate felicity : he then begins to live, when he begins to die. It is not the end, either of his soul, or of his body, but only a separation between them, for an appointed time. 4th, Let him also study, by an increasing diligence, in the exercise of every grace, and in the practice of every duty, to be always actually, as well as habitually, prepared for death and judgment : for when he, in this manner, gives “ all diligence to make his calling and election sure ;” he will, through grace, overcome gradually, the disquieting fear of death and judgment, and will rejoice in hope of eternal life<sup>2</sup>.

Thus I have endeavoured to point out, to the exercised Christian, those principal means, of retaining and increasing spiritual consolation, which he ought diligently to employ. The illustration of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> ‘ Write down the reasons which, at any time, make you afraid to die ; and then endeavour, by faith, prayer, and conversation with experienced Christians, to remove the causes.’ HERVEY’S Rules, &c.

such of them, as the disquieted believer, was directed to use for the recovery of his forfeited comfort, I have studied, as far as I could, to diversify. I have only to add that, if the sincere believer use them diligently, and if, instead of resting in them, or depending on his use of them, he rely only upon his great Redeemer, for all grace and consolation ; he will increase in the principle and habit of spiritual joy, and will in every time of need, be favoured with sensible comfort.

FROM what has now been discoursed, the pious reader may easily see that, no other pleasures under the sun, are to be compared to *those of faith and holiness*. The pleasure of true religion, or of communion with God, far surpasses all the other delights of the sons of men. In comparison of other pleasures, it is pleasantness itself, pleasantness in the abstract. The pains of sense, have frequently conquered and destroyed the delights of sense ; but those pains, instead of having been able to conquer the delights of faith and holiness, have, in ten thousand instances, been counterbalanced and conquered by them. And while the pleasures of sense, diminish ; the delights of religion, increase with the using. The longer a holy man continues, and the higher he advances, in the exercise of faith and practice of holiness, the greater and the sweeter, is his delight. Besides, in order to enjoy, and advance in the pleasures of religion ; he is not called to relinquish any of the pleasures of sense, but such as are sinful, despicable, and productive of misery. Believer, as none hath so much reason to rejoice, as thou, see that thou exercise and “ in

crease thy joy in the Lord." Study to attain an increasing cheerfulness of disposition, and pleasantness of manner. These, so far as they are spiritual, will greatly promote holiness in thyself, and will so adorn it, as to recommend it much to others.

Are spiritual knowledge and faith, principal means of advancing in holy consolation? we may hence infer that, those are usually the *sweetest hours* in the life of a believer, in which, he has the deepest sense of his need of Christ; the clearest discoveries of the fulness and suitableness, of the willingness and glory, of Christ; and the firmest confidence in Christ, for the supply of all his wants. He commonly experiences the most solid comfort, when he is most enabled and excited, to intrust all his spiritual and temporal concerns, to his Divine Redeemer; whose power and grace, whose thoughts and ways, infinitely surpass the highest conceptions of men and angels.

Those of the saints who have attained much sensible joy, may, from the foregoing particulars, see, how necessary it is for them to take heed, that the height of their joy, *do not elate them with pride or self-sufficiency*. The sensible joy of God's salvation, should never lift them up with self-conceit; and the want of such joy, should never cast them down, under disquieting and discouraging fear. The want of sensible joy, should not for a moment, deprive believers of their peaceful tranquillity of mind. Their serenity of mind should be as great, when they are with Jesus on mount Calvary, sorrowing, as when they are with him on the mount of transfiguration, rejoicing. The

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proper tendency of sensible joy is, to humble ; but, through the depravity remaining in the heart, it hath not always that effect. Let such believers, therefore, as are favoured with sensible and lively emotions of joy, take heed, that they never delight in them, so much as in Jesus, the Consolation of Israel ; that they never yield to any temptation to rest in them, or trust on them ; and, that they never think themselves, the more holy, or the more acceptable to God, because of them. The more sensible joy, they experience, the more humble, as well as self-diffident, they should be, and the more “ fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

Let such believers as, by grace, have attained increasing consolation, learn from what has been said, always to take heed, that they do not suffer their fear of sinning, and of losing their comfort, to degenerate into *a perplexing scrupulousness of conscience*. The apostle Peter exhorts believers, to “ pass the time of their sojourning here, in fear<sup>a</sup> ;” that is, in filial fear, which is a fear of sinning against God, their heavenly Father. The Christian, indeed, ought daily to attain more and more of this filial fear ; but he ought also for his comfort, to keep it within its due bounds, and not to suffer it to run out into a vain, and endless scrupulosity of conscience. He should, by studying the law of God, concerning sin and duty in every particular case, have his conscience well informed. If his persuasion, that this or that which presents itself to be done, is lawful and right, be grounded upon his knowledge of the spirituality,

<sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. i. 17.

and great extent of that holy law ; his persuasion, in that case, may be full and firm ; and being firmly persuaded, that it is according “ to the law and to the testimony,” he should without scruple, resolve to do it. But, if his persuasion of the lawfulness of that, which he is requested or disposed to do, be grounded on *opinion* only ; if he be of opinion merely, that it is agreeable to the law, and so not fully persuaded ; there will always remain, a secret doubt in his mind, that the contrary is his duty, and not this. In such a case, if the arguments for the lawfulness of it, appear to his judgment, more probable, than those against the lawfulness of it ; he should resolve to do it, without suffering his resolution to be shaken by the latter. But, if the arguments against the lawfulness of it, appear to his mind, more probable, than those for it, or even equally probable ; in that case, doubting the lawfulness of it, he ought *not* to do it : for the apostle Paul says, “ He that doubteth, is damned,” or, condemned in his own conscience, and by the word of God, “ if he eat, because he catcheth not of faith : for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin <sup>b</sup>.” He who does, what he himself does not determine to be lawful and right, but still doubts whether it be so or not, sinneth : for though he does that which may, in itself, and in the sight of God, be materially *right*, yet he does it not *rightly* ; because he at the time doubteth whether it be lawful or not. In order to prevent his sinning in such cases, he should “ be fully persuaded in his own mind,” of the lawfulness of an

<sup>b</sup> Rom. xiv. 23.

action, before he resolves to perform it ; and then, he will not condemn himself, in that which he allows himself to do. And when he is fully persuaded, that he may do this or that lawfully, and yet some objections to the contrary, occur to his mind, he ought not to delay doing it, till these difficulties be solved ; for if he do, others may arise. Scruples will multiply, the more they are attended to ; and will damp the resolution, and so, mar the comfort of the exercised Christian.

Has any believer, after having been in the depths of spiritual trouble, not only recovered spiritual consolation, but attained an increase of it? His duty is, *constantly to admire and praise* those wonders of the wisdom, power, faithfulness, and grace of Christ, which he hath seen in those depths<sup>c</sup>. The floods of trouble, and the waves of terror, did beat vehemently upon his soul ; but the Lord Jesus, who “ sitteth upon the flood,” hath mercifully upheld him, and “ hath drawn him out of many waters.” He hath seen the wonders of the Redeemer’s wisdom, in dispensing to him, trouble and comfort, terror and hope, sorrow and joy ; and in teaching him by these means, the malignity and bitterness of sin, and the preciousness and freeness of grace ; the wonders of His power and love, in sustaining his fainting soul, under the pressure of his overwhelming distress ; and the wonders of His mercy and faithfulness, in delivering him from the darkness of desertion, and in bringing him forth to the light of communion with Himself. Let him then, with adoring gratitude, ad-

<sup>c</sup> Ps. cvi. 21.

mire and praise these wonders; and say with the holy Psalmist, "Thou art the God that doeth wonders <sup>d</sup>." He ought likewise with holy reverence, and ardent love, to say to his redeeming God, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me <sup>e</sup>:" "Thou hast turned for me, my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee; and not be silent: O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever <sup>f</sup>." Be assured, O Christian, that "it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is *pleasant*, as well as comely <sup>g</sup>:" it will infuse a double sweetness into all thy enjoyments. Though the Lord doth not need thy praises, yet he is glorified by them; and a growing disposition to praise Him, is necessary to thy own advancement in holy consolation.

To conclude: The Christian, who is favoured with the cheering light of God's gracious countenance, may, from what has been discoursed, see that, he is under the highest obligations to be more and more assiduous, in using all the means of obtaining a daily increase of spiritual consolation. The sweetness, and especially the usefulness, of holy comfort, for the purposes of his Redeemer's glory, should excite him to unwearied diligence, in employing every appointed mean of attaining a daily increase of it. Let him live by faith, grow in grace, and take heed that he do not

<sup>d</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 14.    <sup>e</sup> Isa. xii. 1.    <sup>f</sup> Ps. xxx. 11, 12.

<sup>g</sup> Ps. cxlvii. 1.

rest in comfort received, as an evidence of grace. Let him also guard against taking his comfort, from the act, instead of the *object*, of his faith, offered to him in the gospel.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### OF DIRECTIONS FOR ATTAINING ESTABLISHMENT IN HOLY CONSOLATION.

To be established, is to be settled firmly, or fixed unalterably, in the enjoyment of some privilege, either of a spiritual, or of a temporal kind. By a believer's being established in spiritual comfort, I do not mean, his being so established in a state of grace, as to persevere therein to the end; (for this is the common privilege of *all*, who cordially believe<sup>b</sup>;) but, his being settled firmly in the *habit* of peaceful tranquillity, and of holy joy; which is the privilege of those only, who are holy in an *eminent* degree. An eminently holy man, is established in solid consolation, when, though he be not often favoured with joyful frames, or lively emotions of delight; yet, he is blessed with a settled tranquillity of mind, and with a constant inclination of heart, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to delight in God as his God in him. After he has attained settled comfort, his frames, notwithstanding, may often change, and his afflictions may be frequent and painful; but, inasmuch as he trusts in Christ, and delights in the will of God, his in-

<sup>b</sup> John x. 28.

ward consolation, in times even of great affliction, instead of being lessened, is commonly increased. The more sharp and painful, his trials are, his consolation is usually the more strong, sensible, and sweet; and so, his times of outward affliction are for ordinary, the seasons of his greatest inward comfort. The consoling influences, which then are graciously afforded him, serve to render the habit of holy joy in his soul, the more stable, and the exercise of it, the more lively and sensible. Now this is established, and even "everlasting consolation." It is heaven upon earth: it is the earnest, the foretaste, and the beginning, of that celestial, that extatical, that endless delight, which the happy believer is soon to enjoy, in the immediate presence of God and of the Lamb.

If the exercised Christian would arrive at establishment in spiritual comfort, let him, in dependence on the grace of Christ, observe diligently the following directions; which I humbly offer to him, as those which appear to me, to be of all others, the most adapted to his purpose.

1. Let him endeavour with all diligence, to attain establishment in *the assurance of faith*. By the assurance of faith, is meant, A firm assent of the heart, to the truth of the gospel, and a firm or assured confidence of the heart, in Jesus Christ, for that salvation which is offered and promised in the gospel; or, A cordial belief of the Divine testimony, and a cordial trust in the Divine Saviour, for the whole of his salvation; or, in other words, A man's cordial belief of the record of God, with application to himself, and his trusting firmly in Christ, and in God through him, for all that salvation to him.

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self, which Jesus hath purchased for him, and which God, in the gospel, offereth to him. His assurance of faith, is not an assurance, that Christ hath *already* saved him; but it is a trusting, that Christ *now* saveth him, and that He *will* save him, with an everlasting salvation<sup>1</sup>: it is the simple, the direct confidence of his heart in the adorable Saviour, for salvation to himself in particular. It is always the *duty*, though seldom the *attainment*, of the believer, to receive the word, not only in assurance, but “in *much* assurance<sup>k</sup>,” and in every act of worship, to draw near to his gracious God and Father, not only in assurance, but “in *full* assurance of faith<sup>l</sup>.” Now, the way to attain establishment in solid consolation, is, through grace, to become established in this assurance of faith. The Christian must, for that end, not merely trust in the Lord Jesus, for complete salvation to himself; but he must endeavour to place a *firm* trust, a *steady* affiance, a *settled* and an *assured* confidence, in that infinitely faithful Redeemer. It must be his habitual endeavour, to honour the exalted Saviour, not only with the confidence of his heart, but with strong, unsuspecting, and unshaken confidence. It will be necessary that, under the almighty operation of the Holy Spirit, he study diligently, to become “established in the faith;” to “continue in the faith grounded and settled<sup>m</sup>,” and to “hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end<sup>n</sup>.”

By being established in the assurance or confi-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xv. 11.

<sup>k</sup> 1 Thess. i. 5.

<sup>l</sup> Heb. x. 22.

<sup>m</sup> Col. i. 23.

<sup>n</sup> Heb. iii. 6.

dence of faith, the exercised Christian attains establishment in spiritual comfort. His establishment in faith, does not indeed merit for him, establishment in consolation; but the latter, is in proportion to the former, and is inseparably connected with it. Hence are these declarations of Scripture: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established<sup>o</sup>." "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall you be established<sup>p</sup>." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace; *Heb.* in peace, peace, whose mind is *stayed* on thee; because he trusteth in thee<sup>q</sup>." To *stay* the mind on the Lord Jesus, is to repose a *firm or settled* confidence in him. Now the compassionate Saviour, will not suffer such a resolute believer, to continue oppressed and tossed with disquietude of soul; but He will, on the contrary, "keep him in peace, peace;" that is, in all manner of peace, or in great, settled, and durable peace. This is the happy attainment of the man, "who feareth the Lord, who delighteth *greatly* in his commandments." "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is *fixed*, trusting in the Lord. His heart is *established*, he shall not be afraid<sup>r</sup>." Such joy is in believing, or at least such peace, such undisturbed quietness, as is in no other thing in the world. It is, by means of his inward and assured confidence in the love, and care, and faithfulness, of his great Redeemer, that the advanced believer is carried wonderfully, and sweetly, through all the outward vicissitudes of life. By trusting firmly in his exalted Lord, his heart is fixed, a-

<sup>o</sup> Isa. vii. 9.      <sup>p</sup> 2 Chron. xx. 20.      <sup>q</sup> Isa. xxvi. 3.

<sup>r</sup> Ps. cxii. 1, 7, 8.



midst all the tumults and changes of this world. The hearts of other men, are unstead; and therefore, they are agitated by every rumour, as the leaves of a tree are shaken by the wind, or even "as the chaff which the wind driveth away." But, as no tidings of calamity, can shake the confidence of that man, whose faith is established on the Rock of his salvation; so none can disturb the tranquillity of his heart. He shall be enabled to say, If afflictions do come, "my heart is fixed:" "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever:" "I know in whom I have believed; I trust that, he will keep that which I have committed to him;" and that, he will perform these great promises to me: "As thy days so shall thy strength be:" "I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him." Thus the advanced believer, attains established comfort; for the confidence of his heart, is firmly fixed on Christ, and on the promises. He believes that, the Lord Jesus *can and will*, sweeten every bitter, make up every loss, and make all things work together for good to him; and so, he trusts simply to the promise and power of the Redeemer, beyond, and even against, appearances. Having but *one* Object, to rely and live upon, for *all* things in time and in eternity, his heart is fixed; his comfort is established. Come what will, he is "upon the mountain of the Lord's house," where he looks down with calmness of spirit, upon all the commotions beneath: and if the storm threaten him-

\* Ps. i. 4.

\* Ps. lxxiii. 26.

\* Deut. xxxiii. 25.

\* Ps. xci. 15.

self, he intrusts all to Him, who in one moment can say, "Peace, be still." Indeed, were his trust in the Rock of his salvation, as firm, as his spiritual state is secure; his holy joy, would almost be equal to that of one of the ransomed above.

2. Believers, in order to arrive at established comfort, must also study to be *rooted and grounded in love*. The apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the saints at Ephesus, informed them that he offered up this prayer for them; "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which surpasseth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God <sup>x</sup>." To be rooted and grounded in love is, to be deeply fixed, and firmly established in love. Saints are rooted and grounded in love, when they are deeply and firmly fixed, in an experimental knowledge, and an assured faith, of Christ's infinite love to them, and in the exercise of grateful, and ardent love to Him; or when, in the faith and sense of his redeeming love to them, they are confirmed, or firmly settled and strengthened, in the habit and exercise of their supreme love to him, and to God in him. They may be said to be rooted and grounded in love, when the faith of Christ's love to them, and the habit of their love to him, are firmly rooted and strengthened in their souls.

Now, in order to be established in holy consolation, the believer must be established by the Holy Spirit, in his love to Christ, and to God as his

<sup>x</sup> Eph. iii. 17—19.

God in him. Supreme love to God, is the principal grace, the spring of all the other graces in a holy soul. It is, in particular, the principle of spiritual joy. In proportion as a holy man loves the Lord, and enjoys communion with Him, he delights and rejoices in him. He delights and rejoices in all his perfections, and in all the manifested glory of them. He rejoices in the works and in the word of the Lord. He delights in his preceptive and providential will; and in his holy image, whether he discerns it in himself, or in others. The infinite loveliness and love of God in Christ, are objects of his supreme delight. If, therefore, he is always loving and enjoying God, he is always in the same proportion, delighted; and in proportion as he is delighted, he of course must be comfortable. If he is established in the faith of God's love to him, and in the exercise, as well as in the habit, of his love to God; he shall in the same degree, be established in Divine consolation. It will be an inexpressible comfort to him, to reflect that He, upon whom he hath set the supreme love of his heart, is infinitely worthy of it. Besides, when he is established in his unfeigned love of God, he is proportionably confirmed in his hatred of all sin; and in proportion as he is firm in his holy abhorrence of all iniquity, he is established in holy comfort. To be established, therefore, in supreme love to God and Christ, is the way to become established in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Hence are these words of the apostle Paul, to the believers at Colosse; "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love :” as if he had said, ‘ I wrestle with God in prayer for all the saints, that, as they already are firmly cemented together in cordial affection to Christ, and to one another ; so, their hearts may be filled abundantly with holy consolation.’ He prayed for the latter as a consequence of the former. Love is the most delightful affection of the soul. When therefore it is set upon the Lord Jesus, who is altogether lovely, and who is, for that reason, the most deserving of it ; the more fixed and strengthened it is, in the heart, the greater, must the delight, and the stronger, the consolation be, which it will produce. Accordingly, when our Apostle said, “ Who shall separate us from the *love* of Christ ? ” it was with holy joy, and even with triumph, that he expressed those words. O how inexpressibly delightful and cheering is it, constantly to love, and always to be loved by, Him who is “ the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely,” yea,—*LOVE* itself !

3. It will be necessary, for the same purpose, that the exercised Christian, be established in *humility and meekness*.

He must be established in true *humility*, or evangelical humiliation of mind. True humility is, the deep and abasing sense, which a good man has, of his odiousness as a sinner, in the sight of God, of his vileness as a sinful creature, and of his utter insufficiency for his own salvation, and that, accompanied by poverty of spirit. It is, a true sight

<sup>1</sup> Col. ii. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 35.

and sense of the hatefulness of all sin, and of his own odiousness because of sin, attended with a disposition to abase himself, and to exalt his God and Saviour alone<sup>a</sup>. In evangelical humiliation, he is made, not only to despair of ever being able to help himself, but, to renounce himself in every point of view, and freely to prostrate himself at the feet of Jesus Christ. He hath self-abasing views of himself, as an unworthy sinner, and admiring views of the Lord Jesus, as an all-sufficient Saviour. He has also a quick perception of his own defects and defilements, and especially of the *pride* of his heart. He is therefore like a little child, afraid of taking a single step, *alone*; and he is so conscious of weakness and depravity within, and of snares and dangers without, as to cry continually to the Lord, to “hold him up that he may be safe.” He is disposed to think that, his attainments in holiness, are comparatively small, and to count himself little among saints, yea, even one of the very least of saints. And the more he increases in humility<sup>b</sup>, the more does he see and feel, the strength of his corruptions, and the weakness of his graces; the greatness of his natural deformity, and the smallness of his spiritual attainments, in comparison of what they ought to be; the deep and dreadful malignity of the least of his sins,

<sup>a</sup> Isa. ii. 11.

<sup>b</sup> The saints increase in humility, the nearer they get to heaven. Paul, some years after his conversion, said of himself, That he was “unworthy to be called an Apostle.” As he advanced in holiness, he cried out, “Less than the least of all saints.” A little before his death, his cry is “The chief of sinners.”

and the inexpressible meanness and deficiency of the greatest of his performances. Hence, he becomes proportionably poor in spirit, and disposed, in lowliness of mind, to esteem other saints, better than himself<sup>c</sup>. Now, to advance to eminence and establishment in true humility<sup>d</sup>, is a special mean of attaining establishment in pure consolation. “Though the Lord be high, yet hath he *respect* unto the lowly<sup>e</sup>.” “Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to *revive* the spirit of the humble<sup>f</sup>.” “He that humbleth himself shall be *exalted*<sup>g</sup>.” “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself, as this little child, the same is *greatest* in the kingdom of heaven<sup>h</sup>.” Deep humility is, as it were, the guard of spiritual consolation, as well as, the soil in which it grows.

It is no less necessary for the same end, that the believer grow, and be established, in *meekness*. To be meek, is to be of a mild, soft, and gentle spirit. The Christian, by “putting on the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness,” puts on “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit<sup>i</sup>.” He is meek in proportion as he is holy. Meekness is so much the character of every

<sup>c</sup> Philip. ii. 3.

<sup>d</sup> “Should any one,” says Augustine, “ask me concerning the Christian religion, and the people of it, I would answer, That the first, the second, and the third thing in it, and all, is—*humility*.”

<sup>e</sup> Ps. cxxxviii. 6. <sup>f</sup> Isa. lvii. 15.

<sup>g</sup> Luke xiv. 11.

<sup>h</sup> Matth. xxiii. 4. <sup>i</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 4.

saint, that in Scripture, the meek and the wicked, are opposed one to another. "The Lord lifteth up the *meek*: he casteth the *wicked* down to the ground <sup>k</sup>." In proportion as a good man is meek; he is of a loving, a merciful, and a forgiving disposition. At the feet of Jesus, he has learned to be meek and lowly in heart; and therefore he is not captious; nor easily provoked, nor hard to be reconciled. If he meet with unkind and unjust usage, he recollects that, though he has not deserved such treatment from *men*; yet, they are often the instruments employed by his heavenly Father, to chasten, and to humble him. Now it is in proportion as the Christian advances in holy meekness, that he increases in pure consolation; and it is in as far as he is established in the former, that he is established in the latter. "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall *delight* themselves in the abundance of peace <sup>l</sup>." They shall inherit the earth. The earth, empty and transitory as it is, will be worthy to be styled an inheritance to them; for they shall enjoy much of heaven upon earth. The more of a meek and quiet spirit, they attain, they more shall they enjoy themselves and their earthly comforts; and the more quietly and comfortably, shall they pass through the world, whatever their lot in it may be. "Learn of me," saith the Lord Jesus, "for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find *rest* unto your souls <sup>m</sup>." He also promiseth that, "the meek shall eat and be *satisfied* <sup>n</sup>;" and that, "the meek shall *increase their joy* in the Lord <sup>o</sup>."

<sup>k</sup> Ps. cxlvii. 6.

<sup>l</sup> Ps. xxxvii. 11.

<sup>m</sup> Matth. xi. 29.

<sup>n</sup> Ps. xxii. 26.

<sup>o</sup> Isa. xxix. 19.

4. If the believer would reach establishment in holy comfort, he must study *daily to grow in grace*. It must be his earnest and continual endeavour, in the faith of God's free favour to him, to grow stronger and stronger in the habit, and to abound more and more in the exercise, of every grace implanted by the Holy Spirit in his soul. By so doing, spiritual declension and the loss of comfort will, under sanctifying and consoling influences, be happily prevented. The apostle Peter, in order to prevent the believers to whom he wrote, from being so led away with the error of the wicked, as to fall from their own steadfastness, directed them to "grow in grace <sup>p</sup>." Believers, "holding the head, and having nourishment ministered," ought in point of duty, as well as of privilege, to "increase with the increase of God <sup>q</sup>." It is their duty, to "grow up into Christ who is the head," not only in all things, but at all times <sup>r</sup>. Their path should always be "as the morning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day <sup>s</sup>." They ought at all times, to grow inwardly, by faith and love, cleaving more firmly to Christ the head of gracious influences; to grow outwardly, by being more and more fruitful in good works <sup>t</sup>; to grow upward, in heavenly mindedness, and joy in God <sup>u</sup>; and to grow downward, in humility, and self-denial <sup>w</sup>. To grow thus in grace, and to grow continually in it, is the sure way to attain establishment in spiritual comfort. For, the more a holy

<sup>p</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 18.<sup>q</sup> Col. ii. 19.<sup>r</sup> Eph. iv. 15.<sup>s</sup> Prov. iv. 18.<sup>t</sup> Tit. iii. 8.<sup>u</sup> Philip. iii. 20.<sup>w</sup> Hcs. xiv. 5.



man advances in grace, the firmer do his habits of grace become; and the firmer they are, the more is "his heart established with grace<sup>x</sup>." The more it is established with grace, the more is he established in the truth, so as to "continue in the faith grounded and settled<sup>y</sup>;" and the more this is the case with him, the more is "his heart established unblameable in holiness<sup>z</sup>." But, in proportion as his heart is established in holiness, which comprises joy, and which is the only true felicity of an immortal soul; it is established in holy consolation.

5. It will be necessary, for the same purpose, that he be continually upon his guard against *sinning, in his use and enjoyment of lawful things*. The believer may assure himself, that he pursues and uses lawful things, in an unlawful manner;—if he desire them, or enjoy them, immoderately; if he love any of them so passionately, as to have his heart inflamed with it<sup>a</sup>, and to be hindered by it, from the vigorous exercise of grace, or the spiritual performance of duty; if his desire and endeavour, to obtain the enjoyment of some outward comforts, become ardent, and render him impatient<sup>b</sup>; so that he begins to say, 'I *must* have such and such a thing, whatever it may cost me;' if his heart become so fond, and so tender, of any of his earthly comforts, as not to be able to endure the thought, that either the word, or the rod of God, should come so near as to touch it<sup>c</sup>; if he entertain hopes of high satisfaction from any outward enjoyment,

<sup>x</sup> Heb. xiii. 9.

<sup>y</sup> Col. i. 23.

<sup>z</sup> 1 Thess. iii. 13.

<sup>a</sup> Isa. lvii. 5.

<sup>b</sup> Gen. xxx. 1.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Sam. xviii. 5.

or promise himself more profit or pleasure from it, than it is fitted to afford<sup>d</sup>; if, when the Lord is by his providence, calling for some one of his earthly comforts, he be so very unable and unwilling to resign it, as to become impatient and fretful, and to render it necessary that it be forced from him; if he become so anxious about the good things of this life, as to be often ready to say, "What shall I eat? or, What shall I drink? or, Wherewithal shall I be clothed?" and if, when the Lord hath been visiting him with some special dispensation, in order to wean him from earthly enjoyments, his heart be still cleaving to them: if, I say, he pursue or use earthly comforts, in any of those ways, he so uses them as to abuse them. He uses lawful things, in an *unlawful manner*, and so transgresses the law of God. He "sets them up as idols in his heart; and, by his inordinate and undue affection to them, he impairs his inward consolation, and provokes his heavenly Father, even to leave him for a season, without the comfort of communion with Him. Now, the love of earthly things, and the deceitfulness of sin, which remain in the heart of the believer, are such, that they will continually expose him to the danger, of sinning in one or other of those ways, in his pursuit or use of lawful things. If, then, he would advance to establishment in spiritual comfort, he must continually take heed, that he do not, in a sinful manner, pursue and enjoy lawful comforts. It will be necessary, that he be at all times, "sober and vigilant;" lest he at any time, so love the world,

<sup>d</sup> Jer. ii. 13.<sup>e</sup> Matth. vi. 31.

as to use lawful things in a sinful manner. And it must be his constant endeavour, through grace, so to use his outward comforts, as to enjoy the inward comfort of communion with Christ, in his use of them. He must always live above them, and never place his happiness in them. He ought, to keep them constantly in their own place; and to value them, not so much for themselves, as for the opportunities and facilities, which they afford him, of glorifying his God and Saviour.

6. In order to be established in pure consolation; it will be no less necessary, that the Christian be firmly fixed in his resolution and endeavour, to *avoid those places, and that company*, which appear to have even *a remote tendency*, to draw him into sin. He must for that purpose, be always firm in his resolution, never without evident necessity, or a clear providential call, to be present in the company of worldly and wicked men; and when at any time, he hath such a call, never to stay longer in their company, than till his business with them, be transacted. He ought on all occasions to shew them, that he loves their persons, but not their company; and, that he is ready to do them all the good that he can, but not to countenance them in any evil. It must also be his firm resolution, never to venture into their company, how clear soever his call be, till after he have intrusted his temper, his manner, and his object, to that Saviour who “preserveth the souls of his saints<sup>f</sup>,” and who hath said to each of them, “I will teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee

<sup>f</sup> Ps. xcvi. 10.

with mine eye<sup>s</sup>." It is his duty to maintain constantly, a holy jealousy over himself; and, having tasted the sweetness of heavenly consolation, to live as distant as possible, from the ensnaring society of worldly men. As he cannot approach too near to God, so he cannot stand at too great a distance from sin. It will not therefore be enough for him, to keep himself merely from acts of sin: he must endeavour constantly, to "abstain even from all appearances of evil," and from that company, and those amusements, which have even a remote tendency to lead him into sin. Such conduct will, indeed, expose him to the contempt and ridicule of ungodly men. Some will account him, a designing hypocrite; others, a precise formalist; and others, a weak and gloomy enthusiast. Be it so: "his witness is in heaven, and his record is on high<sup>h</sup>." He can say that, never till he believed in Jesus Christ, did he know what it was, to enjoy real pleasure, or true satisfaction. He can from experience attest that, communion with Christ in his redeeming love and grace, is so delightful, so cheering; that one who has tasted the sweetness of it, cannot but desire more and more of it, in preference to all the mean gratifications, the polluted delights, of carnal men. The men of the world, therefore, should cease to wonder, if the experienced Christian so conduct himself, as to evince on all occasions; his firm resolution, to prefer the marrow and fatness of pure consolation, before the husks of vanity and sin. Indeed, such a resolution, manifested by a suitable conduct, is indispensably necessary to established comfort: for, though

<sup>s</sup> Ps. xxxii. 8.

<sup>h</sup> Job xvi. 19.

the former doth not merit the latter, yet the one is inseparably connected with the other. The more firmly fixed, a saint is, in his holy resolution and endeavour, always to avoid whatever hath a known tendency to draw him into sin ; the more established, shall he be, in his enjoyment of everlasting consolation: “ I have not sat with vain persons,” says the holy Psalmist, “ neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil-doers ; and I will not sit with the wicked <sup>1</sup>.” And again, “ Blessed is the man, that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season : his leaf also shall not wither ; and whatsoever he doth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so <sup>k</sup>.”

7. If the advanced Christian, would arrive at establishment in spiritual comfort, he must attain some degree of *establishment in the assurance of sense*. The assurance of sense, is an assurance of vital union with Christ, or of personal interest in him, founded on scriptural evidences thereof. It is the believer's certain knowledge of his being united to Christ, and is built on the *sense or experience*, which he has, of his possessing those evidences of union and communion with Christ, which are stated in the Scriptures. In this place, I shall take notice only of *three* of those evidences.

1st, Saving *faith*, is a sure evidence of union with Jesus Christ. Whilst, according to the covenant of grace, faith is the instrument of vital

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxvi. 4, 5.

<sup>k</sup> Ps. i. 1, 3, 4.

union with the second Adam ; it is at the same time, an evidence of that union. “ He that eateth my flesh,” saith the Lord Jesus, “ and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him <sup>1</sup>.” “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life <sup>m</sup>.” “ He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved <sup>n</sup>.” If an exercised Christian, have just and distinct views of the *nature* of true faith, as declared in the Scriptures ; if he clearly understand, what it is to *believe* Christ, and what it is to *believe in* him ; and if, at the same time, his actings of faith be direct and lively ; he will, under the witnessing of the Holy Spirit, be less or more *conscious* of them. He will be enabled to reason thus : “ He who believeth on Jesus Christ, dwelleth in him, and hath everlasting life <sup>o</sup> :” but I am conscious that I believe on him : therefore I dwell in him, and have the beginnings of eternal life : Whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus, is united to him, and “ shall be saved <sup>p</sup> :” but I believe on him : therefore I am united to him, and I shall be saved. And in order to be satisfied, that his actings of faith, are unfeigned, or not hypocritical <sup>q</sup> ; let him, in dependance on the enlightening influences of the Spirit of truth, attend carefully to the distinctions, marked in the sacred Volume, between a true, and a counterfeit faith. There he shall find that, if a man, convinced of his sin and misery, believe the record of God, with application to himself, and with cordial approbation of the whole plan of re-

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 56.      <sup>m</sup> John vi. 47.      <sup>n</sup> Mark xvi. 16.

<sup>o</sup> John vi. 56, 47.      <sup>p</sup> Acts xvi. 31.      <sup>q</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5.

demption by Jesus Christ; that, if he trust in Jesus for salvation, not upon the ground of previous qualifications in himself, but solely upon the warrant afforded by the gospel-offer, call, and commandment to believe on the name of Jesus Christ<sup>r</sup>; that, if he rely, not like the hypocrite, partly on his own performances, and partly on the righteousness of Christ, but on the righteousness of Christ *only*, for all his title to eternal life<sup>s</sup>; that, if he trust in the Saviour, not for salvation *in* sin, or *to* sin, as the hypocrite does, but for salvation *from* all iniquity, and especially from the sin that easily besets him, or in other words, for the *whole* of salvation<sup>t</sup>; that, if he trust for that salvation *only*, which is wholly of sovereign grace, and in which, the glory of redeeming grace, is most illustriously displayed<sup>u</sup>; and that, if his faith work by love, and purify the heart:—there he shall find, I say, that, if a man exercise *this* faith, and be conscious that he exercises it, he may consider it as a good evidence, that he is united to Christ, and interested in his righteousness and salvation. That is “the faith of God’s elect.” It is “a believing with the heart unto righteousness<sup>w</sup>,” “a trusting in the Lord with all the heart<sup>x</sup>,” and, therefore, when the Holy Comforter shineth upon it, as his own work in the soul, it cannot fail to be a comfortable evidence to the Christian, that he is in a state of grace.

<sup>r</sup> John iii. 27. and iv. 10.      <sup>s</sup> Rom. ix. 31, 32.

Philip. iii. 9.      <sup>t</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.      Lam. iii. 26.

2 Tim. iv. 18.      <sup>u</sup> Acts xv. 11.      <sup>w</sup> Rom. x. 10.

<sup>x</sup> Prov. iii. 5.

2d, *Unfeigned love to God, and to the saints*, is also a sure evidence of union and communion with Christ. "He that loveth me," saith the Lord Jesus, "shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."<sup>y</sup> "If any man love God, the same is known of him."<sup>z</sup> "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."<sup>a</sup> "Every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God."<sup>b</sup> If, then, a man love Christ and God in him, for his infinite loveliness in himself, as well as for his redeeming love to him; if he love *all* of God, all his perfections, and especially his holiness, all his purposes and providential dispensations, all his precepts, promises, and ordinances, and that, chiefly because they are holy; if he love God supremely, setting Him upon the throne in his affections; and if he lament sincerely, that he does not love him more: such love, is a good evidence to him, that he is "an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ." A pious mother dearly loves her sucking child; but she never complains, that she loves it too little: whereas, she often laments, that she loves the Lord Jesus too little, and often fears, that she loves her infant more, or at least as much, as she loves Him. But these complaints and fears are proofs, that her affection to her Saviour, is greater, than it is to her child. They shew, that she sees much more reason to love and admire Him, than to love the most amiable of creatures; and, that she wishes to esteem Him, and to delight

<sup>y</sup> John xiv. 21.<sup>z</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 3.<sup>a</sup> 1 John iv. 16.<sup>b</sup> 1 John iv. 7.



in him, more than in any creature. The more a saint feels, and bitterly bewails, the coldness of his affection, or the sinful deficiency of his love to his God and Saviour; the more evidence has he, of the sincerity of his love to him. The hypocrite pretends to love the Lord, but he never loathes himself in his *own* sight, for loving him too little; for he thinks that he loves him a great deal, and is even proud of the greatness of his love to him. Whereas the sincere believer, knowing that it is a sinful, an abominable defect, not to love Him, even in a *perfect* degree; loathes himself often in secret, for the criminal imperfection of his love to him.

Unfeigned love to *the brethren*, flowing from supreme love to God, is likewise a sure evidence of union and communion with Christ. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another <sup>c</sup>.” “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren <sup>d</sup>.” “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him <sup>e</sup>.” “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us <sup>f</sup>.” If, then, a man be conscious that, whilst he loves all others, as creatures of God, with a love of *benevolence*, he loves all the saints, with a love of *complacence*; that, he regards all, with cordial esteem and affection, to what denomination soever they belong, who appear to be saints of the Most High; that, he is pleased

<sup>c</sup> John xiii. 35.

<sup>d</sup> 1 John iii. 14.

<sup>e</sup> 1 John iii. 18, 19.

<sup>f</sup> 1 John iv. 12.

with them, and delighted in their company, not so much because they are generous, or kind, or serviceable to him, as because they are holy and devout; that, he loves them, not so much for their upright, peaceable, and courteous demeanour, or for their charity, fidelity, and usefulness in society, as for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them, and for the holy image of the Son of God, which shines forth in their conversation; and that, he regards them, in proportion to the *degrees* of holiness which appear in them, with such affectionate kindness and tenderness, as to be always careful, not to hurt, nor neglect, nor offend them: if, I say, he be conscious that he thus loves the saints, he may consider such love of them, as a comfortable evidence, that he himself is one of their number. He may for his comfort, conclude that, his love of the image of Christ in others, is a valid proof of the grace and image of Christ in himself. For, as no saint can love a sinner *as a sinner*<sup>s</sup>; so no hypocrite or sinner, can love a saint, *as a saint*, how much soever, he may regard him with affection on other accounts.

3d, The practice of universal holiness, or *obedience of heart and life, to all the commandments of the moral law as a rule of life*, is likewise, a sure evidence of a man's union and communion with Christ.

“He that hath my commandments, and *keepeth* them,” saith the Lord Jesus, “he it is that loveth me<sup>h</sup>.” “Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and *doth* them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock<sup>i</sup>.”

<sup>s</sup> Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. <sup>h</sup> John xiv. 21. <sup>i</sup> Matth. vii. 24.

and the apostle John : “ Hereby we do know that we know him, if we *keep* his commandments.” “ Whoso *keepeth* his word, in him, verily, is the love of God perfected: hereby *know* we that we are in him <sup>k</sup>.” “ He that *keepeth* his commandments, *dwelleth* in him, and he in him <sup>l</sup>.” The behaviour, or practice of every man, who is vitally united to the holy Jesus, is universally conformed to the law as a rule of duty. Such a holy practice, is the grand business of his life; the business in which, he is chiefly engaged, and which, he pursues with more earnestness and diligence, than he does, any other. His understanding is divinely enlightened, to see the transcendent beauty of holiness, his will is renewed, to choose holiness, and his affections are sanctified, to love, desire, and delight in it. He is also constrained by the love, commanded by the law, and enabled by the Spirit, of Christ, to be “ holy in all manner of conversation <sup>m</sup>.” He, therefore, makes the constant practice of universal holiness, his choice, his delight, and in an eminent degree, his employment. Relying on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for all his *title* to eternal life, trusting in Christ for continual supplies of grace, and aiming in all his performances, at the glory of God; he perseveres, through all changes, and under all trials, in the love and practice of universal holiness, to the end of life. He may indeed be left to be guilty, in some degree, of spiritual declension, and may be suffered to yield so far to some temptations, as

<sup>k</sup> 1 John ii. 3, 5.

<sup>l</sup> 1 John iii. 24.

<sup>m</sup> 1 Pet. i. 15.

even to fall occasionally into great sins ; but, he shall never be permitted so to fall, that it will cease to be his *manner*, even in the most difficult situations, to perform *sincerely*, all duties required of him, even the most hard.

Now, when a man is conscious that, relying on the suretyship-righteousness of Jesus Christ, for all his title to life eternal, that, trusting in Christ, for all promised supplies of sanctifying grace, and believing the love which God hath to him, he is enabled, cordially to perform obedience to all the commandments of Christ ; when he finds that, he is enabled to yield universal obedience, not, that it may secure him from hell, or entitle him to heaven, not merely, because he is bound to perform it, but, because he is constrained by the love of Christ, and, because he wishes and delights, and resolves to do it ; when he is conscious that, he pursues and practises universal holiness, according to the law as a rule, from principles of supreme love to God, and of unfeigned gratitude to Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all righteousness for him, according to the same law as a covenant ; and, when he knows by experience, that he has been enabled, under manifold trials, resolutely to cleave to Christ and his word, and habitually to make the glory of Christ, and of God in Him, the chief end of all his performances : —he ought to consider this holy obedience, as a sure, a distinguishing evidence, that he is united to the Lord Jesus. Indeed, universal holiness of heart and of life, is the most sure, the most unexceptionable, evidence of a personal interest in Christ. It is the sign of signs, the chief of all the signs of grace. No faith, is an evidence of union with.

Christ, but that which is made perfect by works <sup>a</sup>. No love, is a sign of it, but that which is perfected in keeping his word <sup>o</sup>. Holy practice, is the highest evidence of connection with the holy Jesus; the great mark of distinction, between the children of God, and the children of the devil <sup>p</sup>. It is very remarkable, that this evidence is much more insisted on in the Scriptures, than any other. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord <sup>q</sup>.” “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments <sup>r</sup>.” “If ye love me,” saith our Lord, “keep my commandments.” “If a man love me, he will keep my words. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings <sup>s</sup>.” “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you <sup>t</sup>.” “Little children,” says the apostle John, “let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous. Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God <sup>u</sup>.” “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments <sup>v</sup>.” The man, therefore, who is truly conscious that, from principles of faith and love, and for the glory of God, he forsakes with abhorrence, every known sin, and studies to know, and to perform cordially, every commanded duty; may warrantably assure himself, that he is united to Christ, and is in a state of grace. Let the believer, then, endeavour diligent-

<sup>a</sup> James ii. 22.      <sup>o</sup> 1 John ii. 5.      <sup>p</sup> 1 John iii. 10.  
<sup>q</sup> Ps. cxix. 1.      <sup>r</sup> Verse 6.      <sup>s</sup> John xiv. 15, 23, 24.  
<sup>t</sup> John xv. 8, 14.      <sup>u</sup> 1 John iii. 7, 10.      <sup>v</sup> 1 John v. 3.

ly, to attain more and more of this high evidence of grace: so shall he arrive, not only at sensible assurance of his union with Christ, but, at establishment in that assurance. Indeed, when a man trusts, with cordial and strong confidence, in Christ Jesus for salvation, he trusts that Christ *will afford him evidences* of salvation; and the consequence will be, that his mind will never be entirely at ease, till he see that he has, at least, the evidences above mentioned. Whatever degree of the assurance of *faith*, he attains, he will in the same degree, be diligent to attain, as soon as possible, the assurance of *sense*, and establishment in this assurance.

And here, I must remind the exercised Christian, that how diligent soever he may be, in the practice of holiness, he cannot attain this holy assurance, much less establishment in it, but by the testimony of the blessed Spirit, the Comforter. It is the same Holy Spirit, who hath implanted in his heart, all-saving graces, that can, by shining upon them, *make him "know the things which are freely given to him of God \*."* As the sun cannot be seen, but by its own light; so the graces and fruits of the Spirit, cannot be certainly known, but by the light of the Spirit. The believer cannot be assured, that the Spirit dwelleth in him, as a sanctifier, otherwise than by the same blessed Spirit, as a Comforter. "The Spirit itself, *or*, the same Spirit," says the apostle Paul, "beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God *†*." The same Spirit, that worketh habits of grace, or holy dispositions, in the hearts of believers, doth

\* 1 Cor. ii. 12.

† Rom. viii. 16.

by shining upon these, by exciting their attention to them, and by enabling them to compare them with the signs of adoption, mentioned in Scripture; concur with their consciences, in witnessing that they are the children of God. In order then, to attain such establishment in sensible assurance, as will introduce establishment in spiritual comfort, the Christian must frequently trust, as well as pray, for the witnessing of the Holy Spirit; and he should continually take heed, that he do not grieve the Spirit <sup>2</sup>.

8. Moreover, In order to his being established in pure consolation, the believer must endeavour, with all diligence, *to make a right and profitable use of the holy Sacraments*. These are the seals of the covenant of grace; for they were instituted, in order to *confirm* that holy covenant with true believers <sup>3</sup>. They, accordingly, in the hand of the Holy Comforter, are special means of confirming that everlasting covenant with them: and they confirm it with them, not by making it firmer in itself, than it is already; but by confirming their *faith* of it, and by clearing up, or confirming to them, their personal *interest* in it, and in all the blessings promised in it.

The believer, then, in order to be established in spiritual comfort, must improve *his baptism*, both for confirming his assurance of faith, and for confirming his assurance of personal interest, in the everlasting covenant. He ought for these purposes, to improve it at all times, but especially when he is called, either to present a child for baptism, or to witness

<sup>2</sup> Eph. iv. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Dan. ix. 27.

the dispensation of baptism, to the child of another. Seeing baptism, in the room of circumcision, is a seal especially “of the righteousness of faith<sup>b</sup>,” he should, in witnessing the dispensation of it, renew his cordial application of the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ, which, in the gospel, “is revealed from faith to faith.” Since the water in baptism, represents the cleansing virtue of the blood and the Spirit of Christ<sup>c</sup>; he ought, when he sees the baptismal water applied to the body, to seize the precious opportunity afforded him, of applying the justifying blood of Christ, to his conscience, for cleansing it from the guilt and pollution, and the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, to his heart, for cleansing it from the power, of sin. And, relying, on the righteousness and blood of Jesus, for a complete title to deliverance from the guilt, the power, and the pollution of sin, and trusting in the Lord Jesus himself, for all his salvation; he should then within himself say, ‘As certainly as I have now seen the baptismal water, sprinkled upon the body of that infant, the blood and the Spirit of Christ are *mine*, not only in offer, but in possession; and while they are mine, to justify, sanctify, and comfort me, Christ himself is mine, as my Covenant-head, and God is mine, as my Covenant-God, from henceforth and for ever.’ And seeing that the child is, in its baptism, solemnly dedicated to the Lord, he ought further to say, ‘O Lord, I devote myself, and all that I am, to thee, to be thine wholly, only, and for ever, to be saved by thy grace, and to be employed for thy glory.’

<sup>b</sup> Rom. iv. 11.<sup>c</sup> Rev. i. 5. Tit. iii. 5.



That the exercised Christian, may attain establishment in true consolation, he must likewise improve *the holy Sacrament of the Supper*: he must, with increasing diligence, improve it for the confirmation, both of his assurance of faith, and of his assurance of union and communion with his great Redeemer. When, after due preparation, he hath sat down at the Communion-table, he ought, with suitable affections, not only to remember and meditate on, the amazing love of Christ; in serving and suffering for him; but, upon seeing the sacramental bread *given* him, to say, ‘As certainly as the sacred bread is now given me, with a command to take, and to eat of it, Jesus my gracious, my crucified Redeemer, is now given me in *offer*; and the offer, together with the commandment to believe on his name, affords me a warrant to accept, and to trust in Him.’ And, when he is taking and eating of the bread, he should from his heart say, ‘O Lord Jesus, I, upon the warrant of thy offer and command, now accept thee as my only Saviour, and trust with firm confidence, in thee, for all my salvation.’ Upon seeing the cup of blessing presented to him, he should not forget to say, ‘As certainly as this cup is now given me, with my Redeemer’s express command to drink of it, his righteousness, and all the promises and blessings of the new testament in his blood, are given me in *offer*; and the offer, together with the commandment to believe on his name, affords me a full right to receive and rely on them.’ And, when he is taking and drinking of the cup, he ought to say, ‘O my adorable Redeemer, I now, upon the warrant of thy free offer, and authorita-

tive command, accept thy consummate righteousness, and rely upon it only, for all my title to the inestimable blessings, promised and bequeathed in the new testament, ratified by thy death; and believing that thy righteousness, and all the benefits merited by it, are given me in *offer*, I, upon the warrant of thy authentic offer and command, *trust* cordially, that thou givest them to me also in *possession*.<sup>d</sup> Appropriating, and feeding thus upon, the body and blood of the incarnate Redeemer, the believer's faith is confirmed, and all his other graces are proportionably strengthened; for it is unto him, according to his faith.

Moreover, *conscious* that his heart is accepting, and trusting in, the Lord Jesus, for all the blessings bequeathed in his testament; the believer ought, upon hearing these cheering words, "This is my body broken *for you*," and, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed *for you*,"<sup>d</sup> to assure himself, that Christ with his righteousness and salvation, is *his*, not only in offer, but in *possession*. And he should regard the bread and the cup, now given him, as *visible tokens and pledges*, of his union and communion with his dear Redeemer, and, of his personal interest in all the promises and blessings of the new covenant; or, in other words, having, in the exercise of trusting in Jesus Christ, for salvation to himself in particular, received the bread and the cup, he ought to consider them as visible signs and pledges, that the body of Christ was broken *for him*, and that the blood of Christ was shed *for him*. And if,

<sup>d</sup> Luke xxii. 20.

through infirmity, he, when sitting at the Table of the Lord, forget this, or any other part of the exercise of communicating, let him not be discouraged; but let him attend to it, after he rises from the Table, and when he sees others communicating. Thus, by the blessing of Christ, he shall find this holy ordinance to be, not only an instrument of conveying more grace to him; but a *seal* and a *pledge*, to confirm, both his assurance of faith, and his assurance of interest in Christ and the covenant of grace. And in proportion as these are confirmed, his holy tranquillity of mind, is established, and his cordial resolution of heart, to devote himself wholly to the service and glory of Christ, is strengthened.

9. Lastly, If the believer would attain established consolation, he should endeavour diligently, according to the opportunities afforded him, *to promote the extension, and establishment*, of the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom. This is a sure mean of his arriving at solid, and durable comfort. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee." "Let them shout for joy and be glad, that favour my righteous cause; yea, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified, who hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant." "I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations." "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her; that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be de-

° Ps. cxviii. 6.    ° Ps. xxxv. 27.    ° Isa. lx. 15.

lighted with the abundance of her glory <sup>h</sup>." When the apostle Paul, had reviewed the success of his ministrations among the Corinthians, he addressed them thus; "Great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation <sup>i</sup>." The constant and earnest endeavours of the saints, to promote and extend, according to the law of Christ's kingdom, the interests of his Church militant, do not indeed entitle them to stable comfort; but they are usually connected with it. The glorious King of Zion hath decreed, that they who, by his grace, are habitually disposed to contribute, by their prayers, their labours, and their substance, to promote so great and so glorious a design; shall, even in this valley of tears, participate with him of that ineffable joy, wherewith he always rejoiceth over his church <sup>k</sup>. If a Christian, instead of being of a liberal and a public spirit, is contracted in his views, and concerned mainly, for his own welfare, and that of a particular party; he is not qualified for strong, and durable consolation. Established comfort, like fame, will elude the grasp of him, who pursues it merely or chiefly, for himself, and for its own sake. One reason, perhaps, why some believers at this day, have little spiritual and lasting comfort, is, that in comparison of it, they care little for any thing else. If they were more employed in seeking the glory of Christ, the success of his blessed gospel, and the extension of his spiritual kingdom, both at home and abroad, than in seeking ease and comfort for themselves; they

<sup>h</sup> Isa. lxvi. 10, 11. <sup>i</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 4. <sup>k</sup> Zeph. iii. 17.

should find that, holy and lasting consolation would come, as it were, of its own accord, and flow freely into their souls. Were they to “seek *first*, the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” they should experience, more frequently, and in a higher degree, that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, of which, his kingdom consisteth <sup>1</sup>.

FROM what has been here advanced, the following reflections are obvious:

IF any of my readers be destitute of true religion and spiritual consolation, he may hence see that, he is yet an entire stranger to true happiness. It is impossible for a man to be happy, if his soul be miserable; but the soul of a sinner, cannot but be miserable, so long as he continues destitute of evangelical holiness, and of pure consolation. The greatest variety, and the highest degree of sinful pleasures, leave the soul as miserable as they found it; but the lowest degree of holy comfort, renders it happy. Be persuaded, then, O unregenerate man, that, so long as thou continuest under the guilt and dominion of sin, “thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Thou art a sinner against the infinitely holy and righteous Jehovah; a sinner in Adam; a sinner by nature and by practice. Thy transgressions are innumerable, for thou hast been a transgressor from the womb. And as the smallest sin, that ever thou hast committed, deserves the infinite wrath of the great and terrible God; thou art at this moment, under the tremendous curse of his violated law: thou art

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiv. 17.

“condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on thee.” Death is already on its way to thee, and perhaps is so near, that thou hast not a day, or even an hour to live. If it should surprise thee in thy present state, the condemning sentence of the broken law, must be executed upon thee, without intermission and without end. The faithfulness, as well as the holiness and justice of that God, whose eternal indignation thou hast deserved, renders it necessary, if thou die under the guilt but of a single sin, that the dreadful curse be eternally executed upon thee. Ah! if thou die impenitent, and without union with the great Redeemer, thou must “go away into everlasting punishment:” thou must be punished with endless torment, “with everlasting destruction,” with “the vengeance of eternal fire;” punished in “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone,” till that Divine justice, which thou hast insulted, be fully satisfied, and till that terrible wrath, which thou hast incensed, be to the uttermost endured. Oh, how inexpressibly miserable, must thou at length be, if thou shalt be condemned to sink, through all eternity, in the bottomless abyss of infinite wrath! How can thy heart endure, or thy hands be strong, in the days that God almighty will thus deal with thee? How shalt thou be able “to dwell with the devouring fire, to dwell with everlasting burnings?” The day is coming, when, if thou die in thy sins, the omniscient Judge of quick and dead, will say to thee, “Depart from me, thou cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Thou now takest pleasure in committing some secret, some darling sin;

and this is a sure evidence, that thou art an entire stranger to Christ, and to holy consolation from him. Now, thou lovest and enjoyest the pleasures of sin ; but hereafter, if sovereign mercy prevent it not, thou shalt feel the pains of it. It “ will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.” The gnawing worm will never die ; the consuming fire will never be quenched. Thou art now surrounded by a multiplicity of objects, with which, thou gratifiest thy depraved desires ; but, in the place of torment, while these desires will continue, and even increase, thou shalt have no opportunities of gratifying them. Now, thou art so desirous of the delights of sense and of sin, that thou continuest to reject the compassionate Saviour, and that everlasting consolation, which is enjoyed in him, for fear that thou lose those base and sordid delights. But yet a very little while, and these pleasures shall not only be irretrievably lost, but shall be followed by the dismal sorrows of eternal death, and be expiated with everlasting pain. For thus it is written, “ The wicked shall be turned into hell.” “ Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest : this shall be the portion of their cup.” “ God will render to every man according to his deeds : ... To them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” Ah ! secure sinner, “ Eternal destruction is ready at thy side.” “ God is angry with thee every day,” and to him vengeance belongeth. His sword is drawn ; his bow is bent ; and his arrows are set to destroy thee.—But why, O why

wilt thou die ? Why wilt thou continue a moment longer, to prefer sin which is infinitely detestable, before holiness which is infinitely amiable ; and the base pleasures of sin, before the exalted, the ennobling, the everlasting, joys of God's salvation ? The God of all grace and consolation, now offereth Jesus Christ, with his righteousness and salvation, to thee a lost sinner of mankind. He offers him wholly and freely, presently and particularly: Jesus the faithful and true witness, saith, " God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." " My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." " Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out." And the apostle John, " This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life ; and this life is in his Son." The compassionate Saviour, with infinite earnestness and tenderness, invites and entreats all, even the chief of sinners, to accept the gracious offer. He now saith to thee, " Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine," the wine of spiritual consolation, " which I have mingled : forsake the foolish and live." " Come, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." " Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Sinner, " now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation." O comply now with the gracious, the endearing invitation ; and looking to Jesus for the Spirit of faith, comply, because it is thy first, thy principal duty, without which, no other duty can be so performed as to please God. I beseech thee, to accept the authentic offer of a gracious Saviour, and of a free salvation. I ear-



nestly intreat thee, by all the transcendent glory, and incomparable excellence of the only begotten of the Father, by all his saving offices and endearing relations, by all his service and suffering for thy redemption, by all his love and tears and blood, by all the exquisite torments of his body, and all the doleful anguish of his soul, by his glorious triumphs and unbounded fulness, by his mercies and judgments, by all the ordinances of his grace and all the necessities of thy soul, by all the consolations of the blessed gospel, and all the terrors of the fiery law, by all the ineffable joys of heaven and all the direful torments of hell,—to believe with application to thyself, the record of God concerning his Son. Whether thou hast hitherto been a profligate sinner, or a formal hypocrite, come now to Christ. Come, because thou art warranted by the unlimited offers and calls of the gospel, and because thou art peremptorily commanded in the law, and trust in him for all his salvation. The moment that, thou beginnest to trust cordially in him for salvation, not only from the guilt, but from the love, the dominion, and the practice of all sin; thou wilt pass from death to life, from sin to holiness, and from a slavish fear of endless punishment, to a reviving hope of eternal life. Forsake without delay, those sordid pleasures of sin, which the sinner shall soon lose, and by faith receive that holy consolation, which every true believer will eternally enjoy.

Ought sincere believers to endeavour, with all diligence, to attain establishment in the assurance of faith, as a *primary mean* of attaining established comfort? It follows, that every believer should

constantly strive to attain *a strong faith*. Without a strong and a lively faith, the Christian may have comfort, but he cannot have settled comfort; he cannot be habitually cheerful; he cannot “rejoice evermore;” he cannot cleave resolutely to the promise, when providence without, or sense within, seems to contradict the promise. It is only by a strong faith, that the believer can live, as a child in the family lives,—without anxious care or fear<sup>m</sup>. As often as Christ removes the burthen of contracted guilt, from the conscience, the weak believer lays it on again, and then sinks under it; but the strong believer takes the Saviour at his word, and relies with firm confidence, on Him, for pardon and eternal life. Thus, being strong in faith, he glorifies God, and God, according to his faith, comforteth him. If his heavenly Father do at any time, frown upon him and smite him; he believes His love, rather than his own feeling. Weak faith says, ‘The Lord Jesus can save me if he will;’ but strong faith says, ‘He both can and will save me.’ The strong believer lives, not so much upon the comforts of God, as upon “the God of all comfort.” He draws his consolation from the higher springs, even while the waters of the lower springs, are running. And were all his earthly comforts to fail him, he knows that he hath still *one* comfort, which is of infinitely more value than them all:—“*This God is my God* for ever and ever.” He trusts firmly, for all necessary consolation, in his God and Saviour who change not; and therefore, no outward changes which

<sup>m</sup> Dan. iii. 16, 17. Ps. xliii. 4, 6.      <sup>n</sup> Ps. xlviii. 14.

befal, can effect any considerable change in his spirit. He knows that he cannot be poor, so long as his Covenant-God is rich; for all the riches of God are *his*. O believer, strive diligently to attain a strong, a vigorous, and an operative faith. Watch, and resist, the very first appearances of declension in the life of faith: Hold fast the truth, in opposition to errors of every kind. Hold it fast, in thy understanding and judgment, in thy will and affections, and in thy confession and whole conversation. "Hold fast the faithful word, as thou hast been taught." Keep the truth, and the truth will keep thee comfortable and happy. Seek for an established judgment, and a firm faith, in all the truths of the glorious gospel.

Should the Christian, in order to arrive at stable comfort, endeavour to be "rooted and grounded in love?" Then, he must study, in the faith of God's redeeming love to him, so to love God in Christ, as to be at all times *pleased* with Him. In proportion as he loves his God and Father, he will be pleased with him, with all his perfections, and with *all his will*: and if he be always pleased or delighted with God, he will in the same proportion, be always comfortable, always delighted in his own soul. To be constantly pleased with God in Christ, and with all the will of God, is, indeed, a difficult and high attainment; but the believer cannot otherwise, become so rooted and grounded in love to him, as to attain settled consolation. To love God supremely, and to be so pleased with him, as to be constantly disposed, in all things, to

° Tit. i. 9.

please him, are in effect the same. If, then, a good man would attain established consolation, he must, by grace, become firmly fixed in a holy and habitual endeavour, always to be pleased with God, and always to please him. One happy consequence would be, that trusting and praying, only for such things as are agreeable to the holy will of God, he *could not be disappointed*; and another would be, that loving the providential will of the Lord, he would frequently observe providence, and would perceive such traces of love to him, in providential dispensations, as would greatly establish him in spiritual consolation.

Whilst unfeigned love to the brethren is, as has been remarked above, an evidence of union and communion with Christ; it appears at the same time, to be *an instituted mean* of establishment in spiritual comfort. By the exercise of sincere love to the brethren, a holy man *enjoys communion* with them; which heightens his enjoyment of communion with Christ. The more he loves them, the more is he disposed, to “cover a multitude of sins in them<sup>p</sup>,” and to “think no evil of them<sup>q</sup>.” It is want of love to the saints, that usually disposes a man, so to quarrel and contend with them, as to mar his own comfort in fellowship with them. Hence, the apostle Paul exhorted the believers at Corinth, to “be of one mind,” and to “live in peace,” in order that they might be of good comfort<sup>r</sup>. He urged brotherly love and unanimity, upon those at Philippi, by an argument drawn from

<sup>p</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 8.

<sup>q</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

<sup>r</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

the comfort of love<sup>\*</sup>. The more a believer loves the brethren, the more pleasure does he take in them; and the more pleasure he takes in them, and in their company, the more pleasant will he be to them; and the more disposed will he be, to “be of one accord, of one mind with them,” and “in lowliness of mind, to esteem them better than himself.” His love of them, and his delight in their company, will render him very unwilling to deprive himself of the comfort of their society, by differing without necessity, in opinion from them. The diversity of opinions in religion, among Christians at this day, and the divisions which ensue, are, I believe, as much owing to the want of perfect love to the brethren, as of perfect knowledge.

Ought the believer to be always firm in his resolution, to avoid such company, as appears to have a tendency to draw him into sin? then, he must learn *never to feel uncomfortable*, far less to murmur, when men of the world, appear not to esteem him. The exercised Christian, is always a fool in the account of worldly men; and he will not a little, mar his own comfort, if he look for respect from them. He ought never to expect, that they will esteem him as a *holy* man, so long as they do not regard holiness *itself*. Indeed, it would discover both ignorance and pride in him, to murmur when they slight him. He is unknown to worldly and wicked men; and therefore he should not for a moment, be uneasy, if he find himself disregarded by them. Nay, if he would attain establishment in heavenly consolation, he

<sup>\*</sup> Philip. ii. 1—3.

must not suffer himself to be in the least, disquieted; though he should find that, even some of the saints themselves, appear to disregard him. He should remember, that even the holiest of men, can in no higher degree be attentive to him, than the Lord is pleased at the time, to make them.

Is establishment in humility of mind, requisite to a saint's establishment in pure and holy comfort? the believer may hence learn that, the more *deep and abiding*, his sense of weakness is, *the stronger* he is. The strongest believer has, in one sense, no more strength inherent in himself, than the weakest. He is as incapable of resisting motions of sin, and of performing spiritual obedience, by his own strength, as he was, when he first began to know the Lord. In another sense, however, he is more strong, and more firmly settled in holy tranquillity of soul; because he has a more deep and feeling sense of his own weakness, and unworthiness, and a more constant dependance on Christ, for *continued* supplies of grace. Thus he is strong, not in himself, but "in the Lord, and in the power of *His* might:" and the stronger he is, "in the ~~the~~ grace that is in Christ Jesus," the stronger will his consolation be.

It is also evident from what has been said, that, as the peace which believers have in Christ, doth not exempt them from outward affliction in the world; so they ought to take heed, that outward affliction do at no time, *deprive them of, or even lessen*, their inward peace and consolation in Him. Outward and even inward trouble, are dispensed to saints, in order not to destroy, but to increase and establish, their holy tranquillity and joy

in the Lord Jesus <sup>t</sup>. Afflictions are sent, that they may be means of preparing them, for deriving increasing degrees of spiritual and strong consolation, from his fulness. When the sufferings of Christ, or any calamities whatever, abound in them ; it is not, in order that their consolation may diminish, but that it may abound by Christ <sup>u</sup>. If afflictions are dispensed, it is, to take smaller comforts out of the way, or to make them cease to be any longer, comforts, in order to make room for greater. Believers, therefore, when they are under affliction of any kind, should never suffer their grief, or their fear, to hinder them for a moment, from trusting and rejoicing in Christ Jesus, who is a brother born for adversity. On the contrary, while they are under trouble, as well as after they are delivered from it, they ought to fall in so entirely, with the gracious design of God in dispensing it, as resolutely to endeavour to confide, and to rejoice, in the great Redeemer. Thus, “ their hearts will be fixed, trusting in ~~the~~ Lord ;” and they will enjoy a peaceful and a stable tranquillity, in the midst of a changing and a troublesome world. Thus, desiring above all things, and trusting, that the infinitely sovereign, wise, and holy *will* of God, may be accomplished in them ; they will rejoice in the cheering thought that, in subservience to the glory of Christ in their salvation, “ all things work together for good to them <sup>w</sup>.” Afflicted believer, thy grief, arising from what thou feelest, either of the plague of thy heart, or of the pressure of thy calamity, should never be suffered to rob

<sup>t</sup> John xvi. 33.

<sup>u</sup> 2 Cor. i. 5.

<sup>w</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

thee of the comfort and joy, which the blessed gospel designs for thee, in what is there recorded of the person, righteousness, and fulness, of the glorious Redeemer. O trust Him, delight in him, wait for him, and all shall be well. Consider that, to thee, he takes the curse out of every affliction, and turns it into a real blessing. Give up therefore all thy concerns, into the hands of thy faithful Redeemer; and trust that, by his infinite love, and his manifold wisdom, he will conduct them all for thy good. Judge not of the love of God, by providences, but by promises. As no *temporal* comfort is good enough, to be an evidence of his love to thee; so no temporal calamity is afflictive enough, to be a sign of his hatred of thee.

Has a believer attained established consolation, and would he continue to enjoy it? then let him take heed, that he do not *look intently and excessively upon his evidences* of grace. No sooner does a good man, arrive at some degree of settled comfort, than Satan, if permitted, will tempt him to look with great intenseness, upon his evidences for heaven. That enemy of his holy comfort, will often suggest to him, That he cannot be sure enough, that he is not deceiving himself; in order that, by occupying him continually, with *laying* the foundation and *trying* it, he may keep him from diligence, in the exercise of grace and performance of duty. Were the believer to be as diligent, in “exercising himself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men,” as in trying his evidences; he would advance more speedily than he does, in the assurance of sense. It is, in-

\* Acts. xxiv. 16.



deed, the duty of Christians, *often* to examine their state and their frame, and to see that they are not deceiving themselves; but, not to be doing it *only and incessantly*; not to be occupying themselves with that, when they are called to faith and love, to patience and holy activity for God. Were those of the saints, who are favoured with comfortable discoveries of their evidences of inherent holiness, to take frequent occasion from those evidences, to think of Christ, and to set their hearts the more, on his consummate righteousness, as the only ground of their title to holiness and comfort; they would thereby, attain more assurance of their personal interest in him, and more establishment in pure consolation. When the apostle Paul was assured, that Christ already lived in him, he took occasion from that, to live the more *by faith*, on the righteousness and fulness of Christ. “I live,” says he; “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the *faith* of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” At the very time in which, the same Apostle had his eye fixed, upon his having the excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus; he had his heart taken up with the *righteousness* of Christ \*. If the believer, then, would maintain solid and stable comfort, let him think more of the Lord Jesus, and delight more in Him, and in his righteousness and fulness, than in his own evidences of grace. To pore upon his inherent holiness, more than upon his imputed righteousness, would soon interrupt and lessen his tranquillity of mind. Evidences are, indeed, delightful to an exercised Chris-

\* Gal. ii. 20.

\* Philip. iii. 8, 9.

than; but Christ ought to be far more delightful to him.

Such of the saints, as are favoured with strong and stable consolation, may hence learn, to express their gratitude for this inestimable blessing, by *the frequent exercise of holy joy*. They should abound much, in the lively exercise of joy and praise. When their souls are satisfied as with marrow and fatness, their mouths ought daily to praise the Lord with joyful lips. Their "lips should greatly rejoice, when they sing unto him, and their souls, which he hath redeemed." Every stream of Divine consolation, which flows in, ought to lead them up to the uncreated fountain of joy, and to excite them to the exercise of rejoicing always in the Lord. They should place their happiness and their delight, more in that which is in Christ, and in the promise, than in any thing which they find in themselves. Rejoice, O believer, in the Lord Jesus. Make HIM the consolation of thy soul. Try how much of Christ, may be enjoyed by thee upon earth, to prepare thee for the full, and endless enjoyment of him in heaven. Let it be thy continual study, to enjoy as much of heaven upon earth, as possible. To be *in* Christ, and to rejoice in Him, are heaven below; and to be *with* Him, to behold his glory, is heaven above. Trusting in thy gracious Redeemer, who "rejoiceth over thee to do thee good;" ask thyself, every morning,—'What have I to expect from my dear Redeemer, this day, to afford me joy?' This question will, under the consoling influences of the holy Comforter, tend to make thee cheerful and thankful, at the commencement of the day. How exhilarating will

it be to thy soul, when thou canst answer ;—‘ My gracious Redeemer will to-day, according to his promise, be with me, to strengthen, to help, and to uphold me ; to work in me by his holy Spirit, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure ; to fulfil in me, all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power ; to guide me continually with his counsel ; and to grant me all the inward and outward comforts, which he sees I need. He will this day, afford me communion with himself, in his grace, in his word, and in his providence. Perhaps he will cheer my soul, even with the sweetness of sensible communion, and of ineffable joy. He will at least, this day, bring me nearer than formerly, to the perfection of holiness, to the end of my faith, even the complete salvation of my soul.’ Rejoice then, O believer, every day, and all the day : Rejoice in hope. “ Hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end <sup>a</sup> ;” and let thy whole life, be a continued expression of grateful praise to the Lord Jesus, for all that he hath done, is doing, and will do, for thy soul.

Finally, Are some of the heirs of salvation favoured, in a good degree, with *settled* comfort ? let them take occasion from it, to *meditate frequently*, on that fulness of inexpressible and endless joy, into which they are soon to enter. O ! the ineffable, the rapturous joy, into which they shall enter, when, in the light of glory, they shall see Jehovah and the Lamb, and become perfect in holiness ! Believer, the greatest consolation, which thou hast enjoyed, or which thou canst enjoy here, is

<sup>a</sup> Heb. iii. 6.

but a small drop, in comparison of that boundless ocean of eternal joy, which will overflow thy soul, in the pure regions of eternal day. O what inexpressible, what transporting bliss, is prepared for thee! What a weight, what an eternal weight, what an exceedingly exceeding, and eternal weight of glory, is, by redeeming grace, secured for thee! Doth not thy heart long ardently for this? Doth it not rejoice, and ever exult, in the cheering prospect of endless felicity, of inconceivable joy? Doth it not look beyond all transitory shadows, "for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour Jesus Christ?" O "set thy affection on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God," amidst all the splendors of his exalted state, and all those flaming ministers who surround his throne. By frequent meditation on that glorious rest, "which remaineth for the people of God," thou now enterest into rest<sup>b</sup>; thou enjoyest more and more of holy tranquillity, of heavenly consolation. To rejoice in hope of the glory of God, is to experience the sweetest and purest joy; joy, which shall enable thee, to rise superior to the inordinate love of life, and to the disquieting fear of death. Consider thy death, as that by which, thou wilt not depart *out* of life, but rather *into* life; and expect from the hands of thy faithful Redeemer, such living comforts, in thy dying moments, as will raise thee above the terror of death, and cause thee to triumph over the darkness of the grave. Though a believer may have fears and conflicts of soul, when he is in the near prospect of death; yet commonly

<sup>b</sup> Heb. iv. 3,

these are all over, before the solemn moment of death comes. His spiritual enemies, are usually made to be still as a stone, whilst he is passing through the river of death <sup>c</sup>. Jesus our great High Priest, hath dipped his feet in those waters. The stream therefore is divided to thee, who art by faith united to him. The channel is dry. Thou mayest discern the footsteps of thy almighty Redeemer, in the bottom, and endless felicity on the other side. Having already tasted the sweetness of pure consolation, thou shouldst long, with ardent and increasing desire, for “the marriage-supper of the Lamb.” He hath by ten thousand thousand instances of kindness, so endeared himself to thy heart, that thou shouldst not be fully satisfied, until thou have the full enjoyment of his immense and everlasting love; until thou see him as he is, enjoy the unclouded light of his countenance, and be crowned with the unfading brightness of eternal glory. Let thy present consolation, then, excite thee often to meditate on, and ardently to long for, that consummate felicity which awaits thee, in the pure regions of everlasting light, and love, and joy. For yet a little, a very little while, and thou, “the ransomed of the Lord shalt return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon thy head: thou shalt obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away <sup>d</sup>.”

<sup>c</sup> Prov. xiv. 32.

<sup>d</sup> Isa. xxxv. 10.

THE END.

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G. Caw, Printer.









